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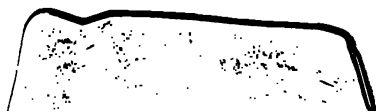
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TOO LIGHTLY BROKEN.

A Nobel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

MALCOLM'S INHERITANCE - - -

CHAPTER II.

MR. DENISON'S STEWARD - - -

CHAPTER III.

THE MOOR FARM - - -

CHAPTER IV.

MISINFORMED - - -

CHAPTER V.

WEARIED - - -

CHAPTER VI.

CONFESSION - - -

CHAPTER VII.

MR. HAMMOND'S OPINION - - -

CHAPTER VIII.		PAGE
BROKEN RESOLUTIONS	- - -	- 111
CHAPTER IX.		
HOMEWARD BOUND	- - -	- 130
CHAPTER X.		
DISAPPOINTMENT	- - -	- 147
CHAPTER XI.		
WELCOME HOME	- - -	- 156
CHAPTER XII.		
ALAN'S DISCOVERY	- - -	- 173
CHAPTER XIII.		
FRIENDLY COUNSEL	- - -	- 198
CHAPTER XIV.		
WHERE IS HE?	- - -	- 218
CHAPTER XV.		
HUSBAND AND WIFE	- - -	- 231
CHAPTER XVI.		
THE JOURNEY	- - -	- 251
CHAPTER XVII.		
CHANGED	- - -	- 264

TOO LIGHTLY BROKEN.

CHAPTER I.

MALCOLM'S INHERITANCE.

"Then come the wild weather, come sleet or come snow,
We'll stand by each other however it blow."

THE following morning, as soon as the sisters were seated at work together without any likelihood of interruption, Alice commenced her task of enlightening Gertrude as to the position in which she stood to Mr. Dalglish; but the astonishment of the latter was so great as to render her almost incredulous, and Alice had to repeat her story over again before she could induce her to believe it.

"And you mean to say that you are actually engaged to him now?" was her query, when at last she had arrived at something like a clear comprehension of the facts.

"Not exactly engaged; but I intend to marry him as soon as he is able to return to England."

"If papa gives his consent, you mean?"

"I hope he will do so; but if not I am afraid we cannot wait for it," said Alice, smiling.

"You do not mean to say that you would marry without it; you, who have always been such a good daughter."

"I would not have done it two years ago; but I think if papa still refuses to allow me to marry, without sufficient reason, I shall be justified in disobeying him."

"Well, I cannot see the difference

between two years ago and now," said Gertrude; "if it was wrong then it must be equally wrong now."

"I think not," replied Alice, quietly. "I was younger then, and we had not proved our love; but now that we both remain unchanged it would be wrong in any one to wish to keep us apart; but we need not anticipate evils. I am very happy now, Gertrude; you are glad of that for my sake, I am sure, dear; and I think you will like Malcolm too when you know him better."

"Yes, I dare say I shall," she returned in a perplexed tone; "but I do not yet quite understand what you are going to do, as you say you are not exactly engaged to him; for I suppose you will want to see him alone when he comes, and all that kind of thing, will you not?"

Alice fairly laughed. "Yes, certainly I

shall like to see him alone ; but we shall not trouble you much, Malcolm cannot stay long in Melbourne, he has his sheep to look after," she said maliciously, "and must go back to them very soon. You know he is still only a 'common farmer' on an extensive scale. Supposing I were to marry him out here, and leave you to go home with Captain Murray," she added suddenly, but repenting her joke when she saw Gertrude's blue eyes fill with tears.

"Oh, Alice, you would not do that after coming with me so far?"

"No fear of it, dear," she said, kissing her affectionately; "but I want you to promise that if we have occasion to write home again before we leave you will not mention Mr. Dalglish's name, even to Bertram; I do not wish them to know part of the truth at home until I can tell

them the whole. It would merely serve to prejudice papa against Malcolm if he knew I had met him here without hearing the real facts, so please say nothing about him."

Gertrude promised, and they were both silent for a time, till the elder rather abruptly exclaimed, "You know, Alice, that if you marry against papa's wishes you will not have your money, only that £5,000 from Uncle John."

"I had not thought of that before, and I should be very sorry for his sake."

"Why, you do not think he is anxious to marry you for your money?"

"No, indeed; but I might like to bring him some. You were not sorry, Gertrude, that you brought Bertram a handsome dowry, though you might have scorned the supposition of his caring about it himself. I shall not be marrying a rich man,

and it would be a great pleasure to me to know that whatever I had might be the means of helping him to regain his rightful position in the world."

However, for the present, at all events, Alice had resolved not to think of any difficulties which might eventually arise, but merely to await the decision of her father, rejoicing meanwhile in her own happiness, and resting contentedly in the full assurance of Malcolm's love.

He came again to see her on the following day, in order, he said, to discover whether she had yet repented her rashness in promising all she had done; but he found her radiant with happiness, and so unlike the pale drooping figure whom he had first seen on the previous day, that he laughingly asked her what metamorphosis had taken place in so short a time.

She told him that far from changing her mind, she had come to a decision which might materially affect their future, and which she thought it right to communicate to him at once.

“ You know, Malcolm, I came of age a year ago,” she said; “and therefore I am at liberty to do as I please now, so if I choose to marry you no one can prevent me.”

“ You mean, Alice, that if your father still withholds his consent, you are willing to incur his displeasure by becoming my wife? ”

“ I do,” she answered; and though her face was pale there was a resolute look of determination upon it, which showed that she fully intended doing as she said.

He was looking down on her with an expression of the deepest affection as she

said this, but suddenly he turned away from her and walked to the window, where he stood for some few moments, as if unconscious of her presence, whilst Alice, in an agony of shame, remained standing where he had left her, her face all aglow with the thought that she had perchance overstepped the bounds of maiden modesty in her anxious desire to convince him that she was ready for his sake to make any sacrifice.

But he turned to her again.

“ Alice, dear,” he said, taking her hand and drawing her into a seat by his side, “ I hardly know what to advise you about this; your own generous nature prompts you to give up everything for my sake; but I doubt whether I should be right to accept the sacrifice. To marry against your parents’ wishes would hardly be the way to expect a blessing on our

union,—and yet I could not give you up a second time. We will not talk of such unpleasant possibilities; but let me tell you of my plans, and see if you approve them. What do you say, in the first place, to my returning to England with you in the ‘Goldfinder’?”

Alice’s eyes sparkled with delight at this proposition, but it was only for a moment, then she shook her head gravely but decidedly.

“No, Malcolm, that must not be; the fact of your returning with us would alone be sufficient to ensure papa’s refusal, if not to arouse his anger against us. He would say that we had been deceiving him, and that we had all entered into a plot to force him into giving his consent. I know him so well that I am convinced it would be the very worst thing for us that you could possibly do, nothing would be

so detrimental to your interests. Do not fancy that I should not like you to come," she added, seeing his look of disappointment; "you know it is not that; but indeed I think it would be so very unwise."

"Perhaps you are right, dear; I had been thinking more of the pleasure of the homeward voyage in your society than of the best measures to adopt for securing Mr. Stevenson's approval, but I am quite willing to admit that I was in the wrong. At any rate, you will have no objection to my following you in a few weeks, I dare say; and that will give me more time for arranging my affairs out here, as I shall have a good deal to do."

He then proceeded to tell her that he had lately received a very advantageous offer for his share of the property which he owned in common with his partner, but that, not being at that time desirous of

leaving the country, he had declined it; he had ascertained, however, that the applicant was still on the look-out for a tract of land, and he had very little doubt would be only too glad to renew his offer, in which case Mr. Dalglish would be at liberty to start for England as soon as the necessary arrangements were completed.

He then explained to Alice more fully than she had yet understood it, what was his own actual position, which had, as he told her, materially improved during the past two years. It seemed that the estate, which rightfully belonged to him, had been most heavily mortgaged by his elder brother during his short but vicious career, in order to meet the expenses which his own extravagance entailed upon him.

At his death, when Malcolm Dalglish,

then within a few months of attaining his majority, came to make inquiries into the state of his affairs, he found that in order to clear his brother's name from disgrace and ignominy, to pay the numerous heavy debts which he had incurred by his gambling and other evil propensities, it would be necessary for him, for a time at least, to live as an exile from the home of his fathers, whilst that stately home passed into temporary possession of another.

There were many who whispered to him that this course would be sheer folly on his part; that no one could claim debts made on the turf, the very existence of which might by this time be forgotten, and that for a young fellow just entering life as he was, with the enjoyment of a fine estate before him, to throw away his chance for such a wild, romantic idea, was

not to be heard of; in fact, he must be mad to think of it.

True, the mortgage must be paid, but there was time enough for that by-and-bye; and as for the debts, why the best plan was to forget all about them as quickly as possible; it was a great pity he had ever been troubled with hearing about them at all. Such and such like were the opinions of his friends, but to them all he turned a deaf ear, and for every one he had the same answer, "It was wrong of my brother to incur these debts, but a still greater disgrace would attach to me if I did not make some effort to discharge them; therefore I am resolved, if it shall be in my power, that not one shilling shall remain unpaid."

And he kept his word.

There was nothing heroic about Malcolm Dalglish; he was simply one of

those upright, honourable, and single-minded men too seldom met with, and too little appreciated when known, who, seeing in what path their duty lies, calmly and uninterruptedly pursue it, regardless of the gibes and sneers, as they are of the dangers or difficulties, they may meet by the way. Once persuaded that he was doing right in the course he meant to adopt, no arguments or entreaties were of avail to alter his determination, and least of all would he listen to the smooth sophistries which told him that so-called debts of honour could not be claimed, and might therefore be regarded as null and void.

I had almost said that no power on earth could have induced him to swerve from his determination, but there was one, the potency of whose spell Malcolm had not experienced until some years after he

had relinquished all present claim upon his ancestral estate; but he could not conceal from himself, that had the deep love of which his nature was capable been earlier called into being, it would have been a hard struggle indeed to have still pursued the path he had chalked out for himself.

It was not until he knew Alice Stevenson that for the first time he felt the bitterness of his altered position, as he foresaw that his want of means must prove an obstacle to his attainment of that on which his affection was set, though even under such trying circumstances he never allowed himself to regret having done that which he thought right.

The plan which he had adopted on coming of age was to let Cumberstone Hall on a ten years' lease, and the very considerable sum which he derived by this

means would, he thought, be sufficient to discharge not only the debts of which mention has been made, but also the rather heavy mortgage with which the estate was encumbered. He deducted a small annual sum for his own use, which, with a few hundreds he already possessed, amply sufficed for the simple mode of living he now adopted, for his tastes were at all times inexpensive, and it cost him but little to give up the few luxuries to which he had been accustomed.

The real trouble to Malcolm Dalglish was in seeing his ancestral home pass, though but for a time, into the hands of a stranger, and this he had found it hard to bear, but as if resolved to carry out the sacrifice he was making to the very utmost, he offered to take the post of steward to the new master at the Hall.

The offer was accepted, as the tenant

felt pretty sure that no one would be more likely to look thoroughly well after the interests of the estate than its owner ; at the same time, being both a kind-hearted man and an old friend of Malcolm's father, he did not close with the proposition, without first representing to the young man the numerous annoyances and unpleasant circumstances into which such a position might force him.

He begged him to reconsider the matter, offering, if his choice lay especially in that direction, to procure him an excellent situation as land-steward to a friend of his own, or to use his influence in any other way which might serve the young fellow, whose conduct had excited his warmest admiration.

Malcolm, however, remained firm in his decision. He was anxious, he said, to obtain a further insight into the working

of the estate, and to learn a good many things of which the personal knowledge would be very useful to him in after years ; and he had naturally rather a taste for farming, so that it would not be at all difficult to him to learn all the duties involved in his new position ; a few weeks would teach him everything necessary.

It was one of his many good points that he invariably made the best of whatever happened, always trying to see the bright side, and to extract some gain out of what might at first sight appear simply a misfortune without any palliating circumstances, and so it was in the present altered state of his worldly position.

CHAPTER II.

MR. DENISON'S STEWARD.

Improve time in time,
While the time doth last ;
For all time is no time
When the time is past.

MR. DENISON'S friends and guests, when returning from their shooting or fishing excursions on different parts of the estate, would constantly come upon the young steward, always busy and always cheerful, but ever ready to exchange a greeting or answer an inquiry; and when congratulating their host upon the treasure he possessed in so valuable an agent, they would hear with amazement his romantic history.

Even those who had not come in contact with Mr. Dalglish noticed the admirable manner in which the estate was kept, whilst many who had encountered him during their wanderings were struck by his appearance, and inquired from Mr. Denison whether the tall, aristocratic-looking young steward was not born to better things. Malcolm always knew when the visitors at the Hall had been making inquiries about him, and was often secretly amused by their manner in accosting him afterwards; sometimes it was marked by curiosity, slightly tinged with a patronizing familiarity, which he found it rather difficult not to resent, but thought it wiser to treat with the cool contempt it deserved, whilst others seemed to regard him as some natural phenomenon, to be looked at only from a safe distance, and marked "dangerous."

Some there were too who respected his motives in acting as he had done, and took an opportunity of quietly but delicately conveying to him their admiration of his conduct. When, as sometimes happened, these visitors were friends and old comrades of his father's, Malcolm was always sure of a warm greeting, and the kind encouragement he received from them was often very acceptable, for it must not be supposed that, with all his cheerfulness, there were not some dreary days in his new life.

On the contrary, there were days when his pretty little house would seem meagre and cramped, when he would sigh bitterly as he looked at the old Hall, whose windows were lighted up for company, and contrast the scene within its walls, where *he* ought to have been master, with that which met his eye as he gazed round his

own little room ; or he would sit alone with his books at night, listening to the carriages as they rolled past on their way to the Hall, till bitter thoughts would come stealing into his mind, which at another time would not have been allowed to find an entrance there.

They were quickly banished however, with the comforting assurance, " It is but for a time ; a few more years, and the king shall enjoy his own again."

To do him justice, it was not Mr. Denison's fault that the young steward spent his evenings alone, but all persuasions had been useless in inducing Malcolm to join their party when visitors were expected at the house. Whether this arose from pride, or from sensitiveness as to his position, he could not quite have told himself ; but he knew that it would cost him a very keen pang

to be present as one amongst a number of other guests at the board where he would once have sat as master, and this pain he did not think it necessary to inflict upon himself.

He therefore steadily and persistently refused to accept any such invitations, though gratefully sensible of the kindness which prompted them, and always willing to spend an evening at the Hall when by rare chance the family were alone, on which occasions he received the most friendly welcome from every member.

Mr. Denison's two pretty daughters made quite a romance out of the noble conduct of the young heir, and Malcolm's history was recounted to all their young lady friends, whilst he was introduced to so many pretty girls that he sometimes congratulated himself upon being so un-

impressionable that he never could be affected by their charms, as he thereby enjoyed an immunity from a danger which might in his present position have proved fatal. The Misses Denison were anxious to secure Mr. Dalglish for their winter parties, and finding their father's persuasions of no avail, they determined to try what feminine arguments could do to shake the resolution of the masculine mind.

"Oh, Mr. Dalglish," they would say, "you really must come in this evening; we want to get up a little dance, quite a quiet affair, I assure you, but we are short of gentlemen, and you cannot be so disobliging as to refuse."

"I am always sorry to refuse a lady's invitation, Miss Denison; but you know I never learnt to dance, and my awkwardness would sadly mar the effect of the

waltz," would be the laughing reply, from which nothing would change him.

On another occasion it would be, "Now, Mr. Dalglish, we have come to ask you a great favour; we are going to have some tableaux at the Hall, and we have nearly the whole party completed, but one gentleman has just disappointed us, and we want you to be so kind as to take his place."

"But I am afraid I am much too tall for such a purpose; what would become of my long limbs in a tableaux?" Malcolm would reply.

"Ah, but that is just what we want; we should like a perfect giant if we could get one," said the young ladies.

"Then I must certainly decline being exhibited as one, for you know, Miss Denison, my natural modesty would never allow me to face such a gay assemblage,

even under my usual character; and if you made me appear as a giant, I should decidedly yield to the temptation of running away immediately the curtain was raised."

Though he would laugh good-humouredly as he refused all their solicitations, the young ladies soon found that he remained perfectly firm in his determination to avoid all society whilst he still held the post of steward to their father, and after a few more efforts gave up as useless their attempts at persuasion; but they both felt a strong regard for Malcolm, and ever welcomed his presence at the Hall when it was free from visitors and he could be induced to join the family party.

Meantime his life was an active and useful one, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that, under his own skilful

management, the estate prospered to an extent which even surprised himself; he found Mr. Denison a judicious, kindly landlord, willing to help in everything that was likely to improve the condition of the tenants, and giving *carte blanche* to his steward as to the manner in which the different improvements should be carried out.

An extremely wealthy man, who had made all his money in the East Indian trade, Mr. Denison was in a state of the most helpless ignorance as to the management of an estate, and, indeed, of all matters appertaining to country life; and it was often a subject of congratulation to Malcolm that, by holding the situation he did, he was enabled to be of great assistance to his kind-hearted old friend, as well as, in all probability, to save his own property from the unskilful hands into which it might have fallen.

He had often had occasion to suspect the strict honesty of the late steward, and he now reflected that, had the same man continued in office under Mr. Denison, it was but too probable that he might have taken many opportunities of profiting by the ignorance of his employer, to fill his already well-lined pockets. Malcolm could scarcely refrain from smiling sometimes as he discovered how easy a thing it would be to impose upon the clever, astute man of business in matters of which he knew nothing, for his life had been passed in the busy hum of cities; his recreation had been his books, and of the quiet pleasures of a country home he as yet knew nothing.

His wife and daughters had persuaded him to take Cumberstone Hall; having failed in their entreaties that he should

buy an estate, they were obliged to content themselves with the knowledge that, for the next ten years, at any rate, this beautiful place would be their own; his girls would probably be married long before that time had elapsed, and his sons out in the world, when he and his wife should not know what to do by themselves in such a large place; therefore it was much better he should only have it on his hands for a definite number of years.

He was glad, too, to oblige young Dalglish by renting his estate, and the neighbourhood was all that the most fastidious critic could desire; in fact, the whole family soon became much attached to their new home, spending a great part of the year there, whilst Malcolm gradually induced Mr. Denison to take a strong personal interest in the improvements he was carrying out, and which

he never undertook without first submitting them for his approval.

“Carry it out all in your own way, my good fellow,” Mr. Denison said one day when his steward had brought him some plans for draining a distant part of the estate; “you are sure to be right, and you know I do not understand these things.”

“But I wish you to understand them before I give any instructions in the matter, Mr. Denison; it will be an expensive business, and I want you to know exactly how your money is spent, that you may form your own opinion as to whether it will bring you in an adequate return. There are, as I have already told you, two good-sized farms which have for some years been almost uninhabitable owing to the bad drainage; these will, of course, be let as soon as

that is all arranged, and I have calculated that the rent you will receive from them will more than repay you for the present expenditure in the course of some four or five years, but not until then. The question for you to decide is whether you care to expend so much, or whether you prefer leaving the farms as they are, merely keeping them in a state of repair, but without deriving any advantage from them."

"Have the drainage thoroughly and efficiently done at once," answered Mr. Denison; "and let us understand each other once for all. I am, thank God, rich enough now to do what I like with my money, and it is my desire to do as much good with it in my own immediate neighbourhood as I can. Your father was once a very kind friend to me, Dalglish, at a time when I most

needed friends; and I do not think I can do better than help his son as much as lies in my power by expending something on the estate which for a time he is unfortunately obliged to give up. You know the terms on which I have taken it are, that I pay you so much a year for the use of the property, whilst I receive all the rents and keep the place in order; therefore I wish you, in everything you think right or necessary, to act precisely as you would do for yourself, as you will do when you are master here again. Spare no expense in doing what is needful; I can trust you not to be extravagant, and know well that in looking after your own interests you will not be unmindful of mine. A Dalglish never neglects his duty," and he laid his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder.

Malcolm was much moved by the kind-

ness and confidence thus evinced, and it is hardly necessary to say that he did not abuse it; but, on the contrary, the gradual, steady increase of the rent-roll soon proved that his rule was a wise one, and that the sums laid out by Mr. Denison were already bringing in a return.

CHAPTER III.

THE MOOR FARM.

All love is sweet,
Given or returned. Common as light is love,
And its familiar voice wearies not ever.


MATTERS went on thus smoothly for upwards of six years, and Malcolm was happy in the knowledge that every year the debt grew less; that in a very few more he should enter into possession of a free and unencumbered estate entirely through his own exertions, which had long ceased to be any trouble to him, as he grew really to like the activity of his life, whilst every day brought him nearer to the time when he

should be installed as master in his own beautiful home.

“What more can a man want than youth, health, and plenty of work, with such a prospect in the future,” he would say when any of his friends condoled with him.

But at the end of six years there came a change. Mr. Denison’s eldest son married, and brought his wife home to live at Cumberstone Hall, and from that moment his position became simply unbearable to Malcolm.

Young Denison was the exact contrast to his father in everything that made the latter so pleasant as an employer and friend : selfish, mercenary, and gifted with an unbounded admiration of his own powers, there was nothing, in his opinion, which he was incapable of understanding ; and amongst the first objects to which



he turned his attention was the management of the Cumberstone estate, which he declared to be extravagant and inefficient.

To these remarks Mr. Denison paid little heed, having but a small opinion of his son's judgment, whilst he had implicit confidence in his steward; but the young man contrived to make himself so excessively disagreeable, that Malcolm found his patience tried in a manner he had never before experienced.

At first he simply listened to the ignorant, conceited remarks of the young upstart, without deigning to make any other reply than that he had always hitherto given satisfaction to Mr. Denison, and he hoped he should always continue to do so. As time went on, however, the conduct of the new-comer became more objectionable; for having nothing to do,

he employed his time in wandering over the estate, inquiring minutely into every alteration or improvement which had recently taken place, under pretext of gaining information which might be of use to himself.

His comments upon what he saw were of the most offensive nature, and often brought the angry blood tingling into Malcolm's cheek as he listened, and it required all the self-control of which he was master to forbear from retorting upon the insolent youth, to whom he stood in the light of a subordinate.

From the first moment of their meeting John Denison seemed to have taken an intense dislike to Malcolm; but whether this arose from the natural antipathy between the noble nature and high breeding of the one and the pompous vulgarity of the other, or from jealousy of the ex-

treme partiality evinced by Mr. Denison for his steward, or, more probably, from a combination of these feelings, it is certain that the effect was a series of petty persecutions to which Malcolm became subjected, through the instrumentality of this amiable young man. It is very possible, also, that he grudged the money so liberally spent for the benefit of an estate which was not to pass to himself; for he once hinted something of the kind to his father, who, however, peremptorily reminded him of the conditions on which he held the property, and which made it incumbent on him to keep it all in good repair.

Finding his father impervious to any hints as to the unsuitability of his favourite, he turned his attention, as has been said, with all the malice of a little mind, to making the young steward's position as

unpleasant as possible, with the view, no doubt, to making it untenable; which he succeeded in doing after a few months, which Malcolm afterwards confessed had been the most irksome he had ever passed.

Having ascertained that upon the plea of ill-health Mr. John Denison intended to prolong his stay at the Hall—that is to say, he found it convenient to live upon his father for a time—Malcolm resolved, after receiving an unusually gross insult, to send in his resignation, and leave the neighbourhood altogether, until he should return as master and owner of the estate. He had from the first determined not to speak to his kind old friend on the subject of the impertinent interference of which he had been the victim; because, though certain of redress had he done so, he could not bring himself to be the means of sowing dissension between father and

son, where a reconciliation had but recently taken place, after years of estrangement caused by the ill-conduct of the latter.

Malcolm, therefore, was resolved to do nothing which might rekindle the smouldering flame of discord, but rather to make any sacrifice himself than give pain to one who had ever treated him with such marked confidence and kindness; he could also leave the place now in the full assurance that all his plans had turned out well, and were in full working order, whilst he recommended a trustworthy, respectable man to take his place.

It was with great regret that Mr. Denison parted from his young friend, and not until he had vainly endeavoured to persuade him to remain; but the real cause was unguessed, so that Malcolm's object was attained, and on that score, at least,

there was peace between father and son.

For a few weeks now he led a thoroughly idle life, giving himself entire rest, and enjoying himself amongst some of his old friends who had often pressed him to visit them, but which pleasure he had hitherto denied himself. Wherever he went his presence was welcomed; for his long seclusion from the world had abated nought of the graceful charm of his manner, whilst his romantic history added to the interest of his presence.

As the summer approached he announced his intention of taking a farm in Suffolk, in order to gain a thoroughly practical knowledge of agricultural farming, which might be of use to him by-and-bye, besides being both a pleasure and an occupation to him meanwhile. His friends remonstrated with him, telling

him he must certainly have taken a vow to lead the life of a hermit, especially as he had chosen to bury himself in a part of the country where he knew nobody. He assured them this was a grave mistake, as he had already been introduced to Mr. Stevenson, the owner of the Moor Farm, and had the pleasure of shaking hands with that gentleman, who, being a very important personage in that part of the world, it could not be said that he knew no one, though his acquaintance was at present limited to this one individual; whilst as for his leading the life of a recluse, they must just wait for three years more, when he would promise them the hospitality they should meet with at Cumberstone Hall would soon refute any such notion.

Early in June, therefore, he parted from his friends, some of whom had promised

to visit him in his new quarters during the summer, and took up his abode at the Moor Farm, which formed part of the estate of a Mr. Stevenson, who was, as Malcolm had said, a somewhat important man in the county, being both a large landed proprietor and a justice of the peace.

This gentleman knew nothing of the antecedents of his new tenant, beyond the fact which he learned from his agent, that the farm had been let to a young Scotchman of the name of Dalglish; but happening to fall in with him as he was making a preliminary visit to the new premises, Mr. Stevenson had been very much pleased with what he saw of Malcolm, and invited him up to his own house to lunch.

On this occasion the ladies of the family were not present, being still in

town for the season; and Mr. Stevenson had only run down for a day or two, as he informed his guest, to see how things had been going on during his absence, but in another month they would be all settled at Moorcroft for the rest of the year, when they should hope to have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Dalglish occasionally. For Malcolm had made a most favourable impression on his host, who was agreeably surprised to find in him a very different person from his predecessors at the farm; and though he could extract nothing from him as to his former life, it was easily discernible that he had been born in a better station than that which he now occupied. He made no secret of the fact that he was not well off, and that he intended devoting his time for the present to the working of his farm, out of which he hoped to make

some money ; but beyond this he did not enlighten Mr. Stevenson as to his future plans.

In course of time the whole family arrived, to take up their abode at Moorcroft for the next few months ; and Malcolm Dalglish was introduced to Mrs. Stevenson and her two daughters, as they came out of church on the Sunday morning after their arrival. He accepted an invitation to dine with them in the course of the week ; on which occasion he acknowledged to himself that he had not spent so pleasant an evening for years ; and, as the whole family seemed inclined to be sociable, he thought it not unlikely that many more of the same nature were in store for him, though perhaps he might not again meet them in quite so friendly a manner, as the house was soon to be filled with visitors, preparatory to the

coming marriage of the eldest daughter, which was to take place early in September.

He really must practise his singing again, for his voice seemed to have grown quite rusty for want of use when he tried some duets with the younger Miss Stevenson, and their voices blended so well together that it would be a pity not to sing sometimes.

And thus commenced for these two that old but ever new story; thus they drifted imperceptibly down the current on the smooth waters of love, till they found themselves hopelessly entangled in the web which their own hands had woven. Day after day Malcolm found himself, under one pretext or another, seeking the society of Alice Stevenson, whilst she welcomed his coming with a joy to which she had hitherto been a stranger, and of

which she did not seek to analyse the meaning.

He was constantly invited to the house ; for the favourable impression he had made upon Mr. Stevenson was fully confirmed on further acquaintance ; and even if Mr. Dalglish was poor, he was evidently a gentleman ; therefore his presence was always welcome at Moorcroft, though, as Alice had said, it was perhaps the only house in the county to which he was invited. But he cared nothing for that ; indeed he had come into Suffolk for work, not pleasure, and, of course, he only accepted Mr. Stevenson's invitations because the latter was his landlord, and living so close to the family he could hardly refuse to be on friendly terms with them. He did not ask himself whether it was also necessary to be so constantly on the watch for Alice's white ponies as

they came trotting through the park, or whether, on finding her favourite walks, it was incumbent on him to be found strolling in the same direction at the hour when she usually managed to escape from the visitors at home for a solitary ramble with her dog.

This had always been Alice's habit, so there was nothing remarkable in her keeping it up now, and if it chanced that her eyes were unusually bright and her spirits good when she returned from these walks sometimes, it was only said how very well she was looking just then, so much better for the country air.

Both Mrs. Stevenson and Gertrude were busily occupied with the latter's approaching marriage; but even had it not been so their suspicions would hardly have been aroused, for they considered it rather an act of condescension than otherwise to

pay some attention to Mr. Dalglish, he being of course "not quite in their own set"; whilst it had always been a creed with Mr Stevenson that his daughters must make good marriages; such a thing as a *mésalliance* had never taken place in his family, and never should do with his consent.

Meantime it was pleasant to have Malcolm to drop in in the evenings, or fill a vacant place on the shortest notice; whilst his duets with Alice were much appreciated by an admiring audience, and certainly not less so by the performers themselves. If any of the guests who came and went, having leisure to study what was going on in their midst, saw what must come of it all, they kept their suspicions to themselves, and no hint reached the ears of Alice's unconscious parents.

CHAPTER IV.

MISINFORMED.

Be substantially great in thyself, and more than thou appearest unto others ; and let the world be deceived in thee, as they are in the lights of heaven.

AFTER Gertrude's marriage the party assembled at Moorcroft dispersed, leaving Mrs. Stevenson, who was never very strong, to rest from the fatigues she had recently undergone. Her husband too went off into Scotland for some shooting, so Alice and her mother were alone for a time. "I am afraid you will find it very dull, my child," Mrs. Stevenson had said ; "but really I do not feel equal to having any more visitors just at present ;

in another fortnight, when your papa comes back, I shall be better."

Alice assured her mother she did not know what it was to feel dull, though she could not keep down the tell-tale colour which warned her of the secret reason why it was now a matter of impossibility for her to feel lonely, when she had such pleasant, happy thoughts to bear her company. For now she felt convinced that Malcolm loved her, and in that knowledge there was happiness for her. It was true he had not actually spoken yet, but there was little need for words, when, as in their case, each could read the heart of the other.

He had told her the cause of his poverty, told her in as few words and as modestly as he well could; but she had seen the extent of the sacrifice, and loved him the more for what he had done. But

he had not told her that in three years' time the estate would be his again, and Alice thought that the man she loved would always be as destitute of this world's riches as he then was, but she had enough for both she said to herself.

Malcolm could not have told why he had withheld this important fact in speaking of his own position ; but there was, in truth, something so inexpressibly delightful to him in the knowledge that this girl had loved him for his own sake alone that he could not forbear, for a time, at least, leaving her under this belief. He could take an early opportunity of speaking to Mr. Stevenson, and would then of course lay before him all the circumstances of which he was now ignorant ; for he must not for a moment be allowed to suppose that in aspiring to his daughter's hand Mr. Dalglish had no other means of

livelihood than those he now possessed. He had not intended speaking openly to Alice until he had first obtained her father's permission to do so, but an accidental circumstance occurred during his absence from home which surprised the lovers into a mutual confession, and their faith was plighted many days before Mr. Stevenson's return was expected.

It may have been wrong in them to meet as they did after this, for though their interviews were not clandestinely arranged, merely taking place as formerly during Alice's walks in the park and woods, it would perhaps have been wiser had they refrained from meeting again until Mr. Stevenson's return, but if so their happiness was of short duration and their punishment heavy.

We know the result of Malcolm's request for a formal sanction to their

engagement, and the insulting manner in which he was treated by Mr. Stevenson; but there was some slight justification for this conduct, which was unknown to the two lovers who were thus cruelly separated.

It has been stated that Mr. Stevenson knew nothing of Malcolm's former life, and finding the young man decidedly averse from speaking about himself, vouchsafing no information regarding his family history, he concluded that there was some mystery into which it were better for him not to inquire, as he felt pretty certain that his tenant had not always followed the occupation of farming.

Whilst visiting some friends at the time of which we are writing, he happened to mention the name of the present occupant of the Moor Farm, when a gentle-

man who was of the party inquired whether the young Dalglish in question did not come from a certain part of the country which he named. Mr. Stevenson replied that he believed such was the case, for he had heard 'Malcolm speak of the neighbourhood as one with which he was well acquainted, and he proceeded to inquire whether the gentleman could give him any information about his tenant, as he was rather curious to know something of his history.

He did not know Mr. Dalglish personally, was the reply, but he had often heard of him as a very wild, extravagant young fellow, who, having run through his property directly he came of age, had been obliged either to sell his estate or mortgage it so heavily that it would never be free again during his lifetime ; his conduct had, in fact, been most disgraceful, and he

believed he had been hiding from his creditors in different parts of the world, as nothing had been heard of him for some years.

This was the garbled version of poor Malcolm's history which Mr. Stevenson heard and believed, with some surprise, and no little regret too, for he was sorry to be obliged to change the good opinion he had formed of his young favourite; but the story came from too high authority to be disbelieved, besides that it tallied only too well with his own supposition, that Mr. Dalglish had once occupied a much higher position in life.

He should not make any difference towards him personally, as no doubt he was honestly endeavouring to retrieve his past errors, but it would be advisable, now that he knew his real character, not to allow him quite such free intercourse with

the ladies of the family at Moorcroft, and Mr. Stevenson resolved to give his wife a hint to the effect that young DalGLISH's visits should not be encouraged in future.

What, then, was his consternation, when the very day after his return home he was applied to by this young prodigal for the hand of his daughter in marriage! It is hardly surprising that, with his mind full of the story he had just been told, his indignation should have been so great as almost to make him lose control over his senses, as he certainly did over his language, or that he should have refused to allow Malcolm a word in justification of his conduct either in speaking or by letter.

Mr. Stevenson even worked himself up into such a fury of indignant and insulted pride as he reviewed all the circumstances,

that he succeeded at length in persuading himself that Malcolm had engaged the farm with the express intention of securing Alice's fortune, as to which he had, no doubt, made enquiries on coming into the neighbourhood, and that he had added the finishing stroke to his offence by securing her promise in a clandestine manner during her father's absence from home.

Nothing could have been more dishonourable than the man's conduct throughout, and it was entirely in keeping with all he had heard from his friend in Scotland; but there should be an end of the matter now, his very name was henceforth to be tabooed in the family circle, where he had recently been such a welcome guest.

Alice was too sensible a girl to fret about such a scoundrel, and would soon

forget him ; but, to do the old man justice, when he found this part of the prediction did not come true he exerted himself to the utmost to cheer and amuse the poor girl whom he saw so bravely struggling with her unhappiness.

Perhaps if he had seen her giving way to grief, nursing her trouble to keep it alive, he would have felt angry ; but when he found that she always sought to appear bright and cheerful, though evidently suffering deeply, above all when he saw that she never reproached him by word or look for the part he had taken in separating her from her lover, the father's heart was touched, and he sought occasion to place in her way anything which he thought likely to interest or please his favourite child.

When some few months afterwards a circumstance occurred which caused Mr.

Stevenson the keenest remorse, he would thankfully have sought and recalled him whom he had rejected with such insulting words; but it was too late, Malcolm had left the country to settle for a time in Australia, where he hoped the novelty of the life he should lead might help him effectually to forget the hard treatment he had met with. He would forgive it for Alice's sake, but if at some future day he should again present himself as her suitor, he, the owner of Cumberstone Hall, would expect some apology for the insults to which he had been compelled to listen.

The circumstance to which allusion has been made was this: happening to meet again the gentleman who had given him the information respecting Malcolm, that individual accosted Mr. Stevenson with "By-the-bye, I must remember to tell you that I misinformed you about that young

be put upon his letter, now that he knew Malcolm to be, prospectively at least, a wealthy and important man.

Therefore he could only regret his own hasty conduct, leave matters as they stood, and hope that Alice would in time forget her fancy for Mr. Dalglish, and marry as well as her sister had done. But this she did not seem inclined to do, for she was now two-and-twenty and had refused several unexceptionable offers on the plea that she was in no hurry to leave home.

Then came the voyage to Australia, the unexpected meeting with her lover, and the renewal of their vows; for when Alice had heard the full account of his real position in life she had no hesitation in entering into an engagement which she felt sure her father must sanction when he came to know the truth, and which she

was determined to fulfil under any circumstances.

It was therefore settled that Malcolm should remain in Melbourne as long as he was able, then return to dispose of his share in the sheep run, and follow the sisters to England with all possible speed. They were to sail in April, and he hoped to be ready to start on his homeward voyage about the beginning of June.

CHAPTER V.

WEARIED.

"This life is all chequered with pleasures and woes,
That chase one another like waves of the deep."

THE London season was fast drawing to its close; the heat of that summer had been unusually great, and even the most persistent votaries of fashion, who seldom found the months long enough for their unceasing round of gaieties, were becoming wearied and worn-out, confessing secretly that they should not be sorry to escape from the stifling air of the metropolis.

Many of the less fashionable people had already taken their departure, and

were enjoying the fresh sea-breezes or the quiet beauties of their own country homes ; but most of the denizens of the gay world still lingered, either from choice or because the exigencies of fashion decreed that the season would not terminate until the end of July, at which time the Houses would no longer be sitting.

Amongst those who suffered much from the excessive heat of that almost tropical summer was Lina Heathcote. Accustomed as she had been for many years to the pure air of a country town, and to daily walks in the fields or lanes adjoining her home, it was not surprising that she pined and drooped when deprived of that which was so essential to her health. The change in the weather had come suddenly, as is usually the case in our precarious climate after a damp, cold spring,

and the overpowering heat had so great an effect on Lina that she was completely prostrated for a few days, alarming her kind friend Mrs. Hammond, who feared the girl was going to be seriously ill, on which point she was soon reassured by her husband, who prescribed tonics for the fair invalid, with a strong dose of fresh air.

"How was this to be obtained in London?" Lina asked, smiling.

"I take care never to prescribe anything for my patients which I do not think is within their reach," answered the doctor. "I order you and my wife a week of sea air down at Brighton, taken in unlimited quantities; and I am accustomed to have my orders obeyed too, so you need not remonstrate, Miss Heathcote. I shall be glad to get rid of you both, though I may perhaps run down to see how you are getting on on Saturday."

then," said his wife, entering the room in time to hear the last words.

"Yes, he has; and I am so grateful to you both, dear Mrs. Hammond, for taking so much trouble for me; but I am not allowed to express my thanks, as it is all said to be done from interested motives."

"Well that is quite true, for I always enjoy a few days at Brighton, and this good man is not sorry to have the house to himself for a time either, I know."

"Indeed, my dear, you are right there," said her husband; "for with such a bustling wife it is really a treat to me to have a quiet house sometimes. I am sure Miss Heathcote will bear witness that I am often a very ill-used man."

"I am sure she will do nothing of the kind," returned Lina, laughing. "You will get no compassion from me, for I believe you enjoy going about as much

as your wife does, only you pretend to be above such vanities. You cannot do without her for more than a few days by your own admission, as you are coming down to join us on Saturday."

"Coming to look after my patient, you mean," said the doctor; "to judge of the efficacy of my prescription, when I expect to see a marked improvement in her looks, so do not disappoint me."

"I will try my very utmost not to disappoint such kind friends; and I do feel that a breath from the sea will be most refreshing."

She gave a little weary sigh, as if she had not much faith in the prescribed benefit herself, and in truth she knew that what she suffered from was as much mental as bodily ailment, and that the remorse which had so long slumbered had at last been suddenly awakened

to prey upon its victim with its unceasing stings. Her own conduct now stood before her in its true light, undisguised by the pleasant sophistries with which she had tried to gild its real deception, and she saw with deep regret the faults of which she had been guilty. In the first instance, she had been faithless to her promise of remaining with Alan's mother during his absence, and from that one fact had sprung all the ensuing evil. It would not surely have been any great hardship to have spent the few last months with one whose kindness to herself in her hour of trial she could never forget, when, too, she had given her word that she would not leave her ; and yet, at the first mention of the pleasure held out to her in a visit to London, she had forgotten everything but the enjoyment she would derive from it.

And what had come of that visit, which, instead of lasting a few weeks, had extended over five months? She had weakly yielded, on the first solicitation, to the temptation which she knew was the one thing of all others of which Alan had the greatest horror, whether justly or not it was not for her to decide. It should have been sufficient for her to remember how strongly he had spoken on the subject; how earnestly he had entreated her to give up all idea of attempting such a plan, and she had promised him, looking up truthfully into the face that bent so lovingly over hers—had promised that she would abandon her idea because it was so utterly displeasing to Alan; and he had believed her, trusting her as he had ever had cause to do.

Now he could never trust her again,

for when she tried to remember the futile excuses which she had urged to herself as reasons for breaking her word, they all seemed too puerile to be entertained for a moment; whilst as for the fortune she once thought it would be her privilege to bring him, he had said that he would never touch a farthing gained by such means, and all the persuasive arguments with which she had once thought to overcome his resolution melted away before the stern truth as she now saw it.

For she had added deception to her want of faith, and had kept back from her oldest, kindest friend the fact of her having become a singer, merely telling her that her engagements were too numerous for her to think of leaving London before the summer, but that she would certainly be home in July; and Mrs. Murray, suspecting nothing, had begged

her to remain as long as she pleased, for that she herself was quite contented whilst knowing that Lina was happy.

She had put off telling her at first from the knowledge that Mrs. Murray shared her son's prejudice on the subject, and the course of deception once commenced was but too easily continued; not that Lina herself so designated it, she merely called it putting off the evil day, thinking it would be easier to explain matters when she went home, and could give a full account of all she had been doing, so that it would not seem so dreadful as the old lady might be inclined to believe it, did she only hear the bare facts.

At first she wrote often, but gradually her letters became less and less frequent as her engagements and amusements occupied more of her time, until one day

she was startled to find that three weeks had elapsed since she had last written, an omission which she hastened to rectify.

It was Mrs. Murray's reply to this letter which had aroused Lina to a sense of the wrong-doing in which she had persisted for so long, showing her when too late that her conduct towards both Alan and his mother had been full of ingratitude blended with falsehood. There was in the letter a tone of gentle reproach for her long silence which cut her to the quick, coming from her who had supplied a mother's place to the orphan girl, and there was also an implied fear that in the midst of her gay friends and amusements the absent sailor might be forgotten, a soft pleading from the mother's heart which Lina felt was but too well needed.

Not that she had in any way ceased

to care for Alan, but she had been too full of other thoughts, too engrossed by her own new, exciting life to spare time for thinking of him lately, and since she had disobeyed his wishes in the matter of singing in public, there had not been the same pleasurable sensations accompanying her thoughts of him as there had been formerly, when she had no secrets from him. Indeed, she had hardly cared to receive his last letter; had read it once carelessly through, then thrust it away in her desk, where it had lain ever since.

How different from the old time at Tenbrook, during Alan's last voyage, when she had watched for the incoming mail with as keen delight as his mother herself, eagerly devouring her letters, and then reading them, or portions of them—for there were certain parts which

she kept to herself—aloud to Mrs. Murray as they sat in the bright little parlour.

Yet now surely a twofold interest should attach to his letters, for she knew that he loved her with an unchanging love, and had asked her to be his wife, which of course she should be some day, for there was no one she cared for as she did for Alan. Stay, is that so, or is there not another who has lately occupied a far greater share of her thoughts than she had given to Alan?

The colour comes quickly to her face as she recollects the words forced from her, in spite of herself, on her last interview with Captain Charteris, and she wonders what madness possessed her to have uttered them. But he is still away; will, perhaps, not return to London until

after she has left, and then she will never see him again, for he will not remember her.

She gave a sigh of relief as she recollected that only a fortnight more remained of her stay in town, and as she had seen a little paragraph in the paper stating that Lord Mountford continued seriously ill, it was hardly likely that his son would be able to leave him before that time had elapsed.

Lina could not have told what was the real nature of the sentiments with which Captain Charteris had inspired her, for her feelings towards him had undergone so many changes since the commencement of their acquaintance; but, on looking back at the last few months, though she acknowledged now that she had never loved him, she was shocked to find how much gratification she had derived

from his admiration, and how probable it was that he might have misinterpreted her manner.

She blamed herself severely for her weakness, for the vanity which had been too easily flattered by his assiduous attentions and soft speeches, which, after all, bore no meaning save the passing fancy of a thorough man of the world, attracted by the novelty of a fresh face. Again she remembered the half-defined feeling of fear with which his presence had often filled her; the sensation as if, through him, some misfortune would come to herself. And though this was folly, apparently, she found it difficult to shake off the unpleasant impression left upon her mind by their last interview, and still more did she rejoice as the days passed by rendering it less probable that she should meet him again before she had left London.

Once safe back in Tenbrook she knew there was no chance of renewing the acquaintance. But though in one respect she now looked upon the little town as a haven of refuge, it was with very dubious feelings that she thought of her return there, and of the meeting with Alan which must quickly follow, for he was expected home about the end of July, and Lina's last appearance in public was fixed for the 20th, immediately after which date she intended returning to Mrs. Murray.

The kind old lady, willing to forget all Lina's shortcomings in the way of correspondence, had expressed great pleasure in the anticipated return of her young favourite, requesting her, if possible, to be at Tenbrook in time to spend a week quietly before there was any chance of Alan's arrival, as there would

be so much to hear of all her London adventures and experiences.

Lina wrote back fixing the 22nd as the day for her return, saying truly enough that she should not be sorry to quit London, of which she had quite enough experience for one year, and that she was longing for a sight of the green fields and trees surrounding the little country town.

For a great change had come over the girl in many things. The constant excitement had not only begun to tell upon her health, but she had also ceased to derive that pleasure from it which had at first been the case, and that which she had considered inexhaustible in its delights had now come to pall upon her with its weariness. It may have been that regret for her own conduct had much to do with this; but it is certain that

she no longer craved for the life which it had at one time been her most anxious wish to embrace. Perhaps if she had the approbation of those dearest to her it might have been otherwise, but as it was the novelty had already worn off, whilst the voice of conscience, once awakened, rendered every token of praise she received but one more pang of self-reproach.

Mrs. Hammond had noticed that her young guest appeared at times depressed and out of sorts, but this she attributed to the fatigue and excitement of the season, acting on one unaccustomed to the life. She also put it down to another cause, which appeared to her eminently satisfactory.

It has been said that this good lady had from the first fully persuaded herself that an attachment, probably an engagement, existed between Lina and Alan

Murray, and this idea having once taken possession of her mind, nothing but the most direct contradiction from one of the two parties concerned would have made her relinquish it. She delighted in a love affair, and would have liked to draw out the young girl on the subject of the absent sailor, but she found all approaches to it met with the greatest reserve. Though her curiosity was thus baffled, her suspicions were more fully confirmed, for had there been nothing between them Lina would surely have spoken of Alan as unreservedly as she did of his mother, or of their life at Tenbrook, of which the quaint monotony had often amused Mrs. Hammond in Lina's descriptions.

It was now nine months since he had left England, a long time for two lovers to be separated, especially when the

absent one was exposed to the dangers of a seafaring life, as was the case with Captain Murray : therefore what more natural than that the girl should be fretting over his absence ? It could hardly be otherwise, indeed, if she cared for him, as no doubt she did, whilst as the time was drawing near for his return she must also be feeling a little natural anxiety as to his safety, when she took into consideration the many perils of the voyage.

The kind-hearted woman quite longed to show her sympathy and affection for Lina, in fact, she determined that should an opportunity present itself during their quiet week together at Brighton, she would try to break through the reserve which had hitherto proved a stumbling-block. It was not the fashionable season at the gay watering-place, none of their acquaintances were there, and the two

ladies spent their time as they pleased, strictly following out the doctor's directions, by imbibing as much fresh air as possible during their seven days' stay.

CHAPTER VI.

CONFESSION.

“My heart is sick with longing, though I feed on hope.”

ONE evening, when the sun's declining rays gave a more grateful and temperate heat than had been felt during the day, Mrs. Hammond and Lina sat on the beach enjoying the breeze which had just sprung up from the sea, refreshing after the exhausting heat of the mid-day hours.

Lina was looking better for the change, though still pale and unlike herself; she sat leaning slightly forward, her cheek resting on her hand, her eyes gazing out wistfully towards the distant horizon.

Mrs. Hammond was seated so that she could watch Lina's face without being observed by her, keeping purposely a little in the background, for she thought this was a good opportunity for broaching the subject she had in her mind, and as was always her way she plunged into it abruptly without any needless fencing about.

"Are your thoughts away over the sea, Lina?" she asked.

"Over the sea; why should they be?"
 But she did not turn her head, and the sudden start showed that she had been deceived.

"Remember, dear, if my suspicions are correct that is just where they ought to be. Why do you not make a friend of me, Lina, and tell me all about it? I ~~trust~~ how it will ~~help~~ ~~me~~ ~~you~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~world~~ to me, but you are so ~~secretive~~ that you have told me nothing ~~about~~."

"What shall I tell you, Mrs. Hammond?"

"Tell me about your engagement to Captain Murray, for I am sure it is as I think, and I believe you have just been fretting yourself ill about his long absence, like a silly little thing as you are. Nay, child, I did not mean to hurt you," as she saw the bright eyes fill with tears.

"It is not as you think; I am not engaged to Alan. He is far, far too good for me, and you must forget that you ever fancied there was anything between us."

Mrs. Hammond looked much surprised. "Then do you not care for each other?" she asked.

Lina made no reply, but the tears which had gathered now fell quickly down her cheeks, and she did not seem to heed

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"Are your thoughts away over the sea, Lina?" she asked.

"Over the sea; why should they be?" but she did not turn her head, and the sudden start showed that she had been detected.

"Because, dear, if my suspicions are correct, that is just where they ought to be. Why do you not make a friend of me, Lina, and tell me all about it? I guessed how it was when first you came to me, but you are so reserved that you have told me nothing yourself."

“What shall I tell you, Mrs. Hammond?”

“Tell me about your engagement to Captain Murray, for I am sure it is as I think, and I believe you have just been fretting yourself ill about his long absence, like a silly little thing as you are. Nay, child, I did not mean to hurt you,” as she saw the bright eyes fill with tears.

“It is not as you think; I am not engaged to Alan. He is far, far too good for me, and you must forget that you ever fancied there was anything between us.”

Mrs. Hammond looked much surprised. “Then do you not care for each other?” she asked.

Lina made no reply, but the tears which had gathered now fell quickly down her cheeks, and she did not seem to heed

them, as she sat with the far-off look still in her troubled face.

Mrs. Hammond took her hand, and pressing it kindly she said, "I should like to help you if you have any sorrow or trouble, Lina, for the sake of your father, who has often been of the greatest service to me by giving me a kind word of encouragement at a time when I have stood sorely in need of it. I do not wish to intrude myself into anything which you may wish to keep from me, but believe me that a trouble is often half removed by sharing it with another, and I think, as you have no one else here to speak to, it might be a comfort if you would confide in me. You will find I can be trusted, for I have had many a confidence in my day."

"You are too kind to me," Lina answered presently, after apparently considering whether she should tell her friend

what it was that caused her so much pain ;
“ but I am afraid in this case you cannot help me. What should you say if I told you that I had wilfully disobeyed the wishes of my best, dearest friend, and broken a promise which I made most seriously, faithfully intending to keep it?”

“I should say you had done very wrong, if it were a promise that your friend had any right to extract, without making you act in opposition to your own principles.”

“Then that is what I have done. I promised Alan that I would entirely give up the wish to sing in public, because I found he so thoroughly disapproved of it, and that my doing so would make him very unhappy. I promised him that I would stay with his mother until he returned from sea, and you know how I have kept my word to him,” she exclaimed, passionately.

“But, Lina, had he any right to ask you to do these things?”

“No one had a better right. He has been my good angel ever since I can remember; always helping me when I have been in difficulty, leading me back when I have done wrong, and putting up with all my faults, as no one else ever could have done. I will not deceive you, Mrs. Hammond, he has asked me to marry him, but he would not allow me to bind myself to him until I had had time to reflect upon what he said, for he thought it would be taking an unfair advantage of my inexperience if he let me become engaged to him whilst I was so young. He told me he left me perfectly free, and that I was to tell him my decision when next he came home.”

“That was acting generously, Lina; he must be a fine fellow, though I cannot

see now why he chose to bind you to giving up what you had set your heart upon. After all, what harm has come of your trying it for a short time?"

"That is hardly the question," answered Lina, gently, for she knew her friend to be extremely sensitive on the subject of her former profession: "Alan had a prejudice against it, and did not wish me to attempt it; that ought to have been quite sufficient reason for my giving it up, even if gratitude for all his and Mrs. Murray's goodness to me had not prompted me to undertake nothing without their express sanction. I have done very wrong and must suffer the consequences, whatever they may be."

"They will not be very terrible, dear, I hope, for no doubt when all the circumstances are taken into consideration you will soon be forgiven. You can lay as

much of the blame as you choose on my shoulders, for after all I am really the guilty party, as it was my persuasions which caused you to make the trial of your voice."

"It was your kindness I know, because you saw how very much I wished to sing in public; but I feel sure you would never have attempted to urge me if I had only possessed courage enough to tell you the truth from the first, so I have but myself to blame."

"That is true, my dear. I wish indeed you had told me, but I imagined that one reason why you were so anxious about it was, that the money you received for your engagement from Mr. Colvile might form part of your marriage portion. See what fanciful schemes my busy brain has been weaving on your account."

"You were right in that part of your

conjectures. I made the money an excuse to myself, forgetting that Alan had said he would not touch a farthing; would rather have me without any," and she blushed at the remembrance of his loving words; "but now I have forfeited his esteem, making myself unworthy of him for ever."

"He will forgive it, Lina. A man who loves truly is not a very severe judge, depend upon it. You must candidly admit your faults, telling him how sorely you were tempted, aided, and abetted by me, and even by my husband; beg for his full pardon, and see if you are not reinstated in his good opinion before many hours have passed."

The girl smiled sadly, but she only said, "I see you know nothing of Alan's nature, Mrs. Hammond; there is only one thing which ever makes him hard or unforgiv-

ing, and that is untruthfulness. The more he cares for a person too, the more he expects, and he is not one of those weak characters who overlook a fault merely because they find it less trouble than taking notice of it. I know too well how it will grieve him to find that I have broken my word to him when he had trusted me."

"When will Captain Murray be in England, Lina?" her friend asked, after a pause.

"About the end of this month or early in August. His ship was to sail some time in April, but they were not quite certain of the date."

"And has he not heard that you had left Tenbrook to come up to London?"

"We wrote to him after I came to you, but it was doubtful whether he would receive the letters before sailing."

“ Well, dear, I am very sorry for you, and I hope you will remember that I am always willing to do anything I can to help you, either now or at any future time; but I really do think you magnify the extent of your own fault as well as of the displeasure you are likely to incur. It is a very venial fault in my mind, and after all, as I said before, what harm has come of it? You have seen a little more of life under a different phase, that is all, and I have taken very good care of my charge.”

Lina expressed full concurrence in the last part of this speech, thanking her good-natured hostess once more for all the kindness she had met with at her hands; but she felt that she had failed to derive much comfort from the confession she had made to her, as it was evident they viewed the matter from such widely different points, Lina thinking only of her broken faith,

whilst the elder lady dwelt more upon the harmlessness of that calling from which her young friend was to have been debarred by a mere caprice on the part of her lover.

They returned to London, and only a week more remained of Lina's visit to the Hammonds, during which time she was to appear at two farewell concerts, which would terminate her successful engagement with Mr. Colville.

These were to take place on the eighteenth and twentieth of the month, and as the day for the first one approached, Lina could hardly account for the impatience with which she welcomed it, or for the almost feverish longing which possessed her to have done with all that formed a part of her London life, and to be once more in quiet and peace in her own despised country home.

A few days spent there with Mrs.

Murray, far away from the bustle and turmoil of the busy metropolis, would soon restore her to her wonted health, nerve her for the coming meeting with Alan, and the confession she would have to make to him when that time came. She felt an absolute craving too for the motherly protection she was sure of receiving from her old friend, when she told her the story of her weakness and want of faith towards one whose love she now knew how to prize, when it seemed as though she might have forfeited it by her own conduct.


CHAPTER VII.

MR. HAMMOND'S OPINION.

*"A woman's love is like that Syrian flower
That buds, and spreads, and withers in an hour."*

It is not to be supposed that the marked attention which Lina had received from Captain Charteris during his stay in London had passed unnoticed by Mrs. Hammond; but his conduct had been rather a source of amusement to her, and had not sufficed to awaken any serious reflections in her mind as to the result.

During the course of her professional career, it had so frequently happened to



her to watch the extreme and noticeable attentions paid by men of good family to the young artistes whose captivating manners or appearance rendered them objects of attraction, but whose charms failed to make any permanent impression on their admirers, that one more affair of the same nature cost her little or no anxiety. She smiled to herself as she saw Captain Charteris return again and again to the side of her fair charge, apparently unable to resist the fascination of her lovely face; but she saw also that his manner was strictly respectful, that, apart from him, though she was in position, he invariably treated Lina with that courtesy due to her as a gentlewoman; and seeing all this, Mrs. Hammond was satisfied.

She knew the affair could go no further than a mere flirtation, if indeed it could be deemed so at all, when the affections

of one were engaged, as she felt convinced that the girl's were, and when the only feeling that was likely to exist on the gentleman's part was great admiration for the young singer's beauty. Of course it meant nothing more than this, as she had said to her husband once in reply to a remonstrance from him as to her encouraging Captain Charteris's visits to their house.

"He only thinks her a very handsome girl, admires her singing, and likes talking to her, so there can be no harm in that. Besides, he sees that we are so particular as to whom we introduce to Lina, that I dare say he is a little flattered to find his presence always welcomed, when perhaps many of his own friends are longing for admittance to the favourite of the day."

"And what will be the consequence,

Louise, if Miss Heathcote begins to find his attentions so pleasing that she cannot dispense with them without some suffering to herself? ”

“ That is not the least probable,” returned Mrs. Hammond ; “ you forget what I told you, that I am quite convinced there is an attachment between Lina and young Murray, which will effectually prevent her from deriving any harm from Captain Charteris’s attentions.”

“ I am not so sure of that,” said her husband. “ She may be attached to young Murray, who is a very worthy fellow too, and yet may not be altogether indifferent to such a handsome, aristocratic young man, when she sees how much he is attracted by her, and how very deferentially he treats her. It is a dangerous game when one lover is absent, whilst the other, besides being on the spot, possesses

all the advantages which this man does Miss Heathcote must see that he forsake his own circle of acquaintances in coming amongst us, and knows very well that he comes for no other reason than to see her. He never misses an opportunity of hearing her sing, though I have heard him tell her he had given up other engagements to do so; and all this cannot fail to be very flattering to a girl fresh from the country, too, as she is."

"Yes, it may be flattering; but what of that? It only adds a little more to all she has received since the first night she sang in London; and Lina is not the girl to be spoilt by admiration. You said yourself how natural she was, how completely unspoiled by her life up here, which has been a pretty good test, as it is such an entire change from everything she has been accustomed to. If it had

not been that her affections are engaged, I should not like Captain Charteris to have seen so much of her ; because, having seen so little of life, she might possibly have imagined that he meant something serious ; but, as it is, I feel quite secure as far as she is concerned. She likes his attention, as every pretty girl does like being admired, and having her society sought by a man who is worth talking to ; but beyond that there is no fear for her. You may trust me ; I have seen too many of these little affairs not to know when they are in earnest, and when carried on for the amusement of the hour as this is. He is not likely to misunderstand her either, for her manner is discretion itself."

"That is certainly true. Nothing can be more admirable than Miss Heathcote's manner ; though I have sometimes fancied

there was a shade of embarrassment about her when Captain Charteris appeared on the scene; but I dare say you are right after all; women are the best judges of each other in matters of this sort. I only hope we may not have to repent allowing him to see so much of our guest, for we really know nothing whatever about him; and I invited him here at first under the false impression that he was a friend of Miss Heathcote's, when it turned out that he had only met her two or three times."

"But you knew him yourself, I thought."

"I was called in to attend him once when he met with a slight accident years ago; but I think I had scarcely spoken to him half-a-dozen times since then, and had not seen him at all for the last three years."

"Well, at any rate, we know *who* he is, which is perhaps as much as we really



know about most of the young men who come to the house."

"The fact of his being Lord Mountford's son, however, does not at all vouch for his being a respectable member of society; in fact, I should much prefer his being in a lower rank of life, as he chooses to make himself so completely one of our *côterie* for the time being."

"So should I," assented his wife; "but that I think that fact is in itself a sufficient guarantee for his meaning nothing serious by his attentions to Lina, and for her accepting them in the spirit in which they are offered, as a tribute to her beauty. She will probably tell Captain Murray all about it; and they will have a good laugh together over Lina's triumphs; for there are others who admire her, as you must notice."

"Yes; but I see every one give way

when Captain Charteris appears, as if there could be no idea of competition with him."

"Simply because he has rather a commanding manner with people whom he does not care about; and he likes to assert his right by being the oldest friend, or acquaintance at least, that Lina has here."

"Rather an unsatisfactory data to go upon, then, considering that he only met her last autumn in the country; but quite sufficient, I suppose, for a man who is, or fancies himself, in love. But if you think it is all right, of course I can say nothing more, only I cannot help thinking it might be as well if you were to speak to Miss Heathcote."

"That is so like a man's advice," interrupted his wife, laughing; "speak to her, and put ideas into her head which

never existed there before! No indeed, John; I shall leave matters to take their own course, for I can trust to Lina's own good sense, and am quite sure that neither she nor Captain Charteris are likely to misunderstand each other. So, my dear old man, make yourself quite easy on the subject, and leave me to take care of Lina. You may take my word for it, that we shall receive an invitation to Alan Murray's wedding before many months are over, as he is coming home this summer; and I should not wonder if Captain Charteris asks me to be the bearer of a handsome present to the bride."

By which conversation it will be seen that Mrs. Hammond had no anxiety on the part of her young friend, though she could not help feeling rather pleased than otherwise, when she found that his father's illness would cause Captain Char-

teris's temporary absence from town, as she saw that her husband still continued to entertain some fears as to the prudence of encouraging that gentleman's frequent attendance at their musical and other entertainments.

Mr. Hammond, indeed, was inclined to attribute Lina's depression and indisposition to the sudden cessation of the attentions to which she had been accustomed, and pointed this out to his wife as a proof that he had been right; but that lady indignantly scorned the idea, and on her return from Brighton somewhat triumphantly announced to her husband that there was undoubtedly a very strong attachment between Lina and young Murray, but that the girl was fretting herself ill about some foolish promise he had extracted from her before he sailed the last time, which would all be set right as soon as they met again.

It did not appear, however, as if Lina herself thought the matter would be so easily rectified, for it evidently preyed more heavily on her mind as time passed on. The little change to Brighton had not been of any permanent benefit to her, and on her return to London her spirits alternated fitfully between a feverish restlessness and the languor of weakness, so that, in spite of her assurances that she was not really ill, Mrs. Hammond could not help a feeling of thankfulness that at the end of a week she should have no further responsibility with regard to her guest.

Lina frankly confessed that the perpetual excitement of the last few months had been too much for her; that were it to continue much longer she must certainly give way, but that a return to quiet and the fresh air of her old home would speedily restore her lost strength.

When asked if she would like to cancel her engagements, giving up her two farewell concerts, she would not consent to such a proceeding, less from dislike to disappointing the public than from a wish to keep her word with Mr. Colvile, who had proved so kind and liberal in all his relations with the new singer.

Two more evenings would quickly be over; then home, rest, and the quietude for which her weary spirit now longed intensely would be her portion for a time. What would come after that she did not exactly know, for when Alan had arrived it would then be time enough to decide how and in what manner her story was to be told.

CHAPTER VIII.

BROKEN RESOLUTIONS.

"Oh what a tangled web we weave
When first we practise to deceive."

IN the meantime old Lord Mountford, in spite of the predictions of the medical men attending him, has taken a turn for the better, is pronounced, in fact, out of danger for the present, and his son, availing himself of this opportunity for escape, is speeding away as fast as the express train will carry him, to reach London on the afternoon of Monday, 18th July.

It would have been well for him, as for others in our story, had his father's illness

detained Captain Charteris for another week in Scotland, as his own weak will was not sufficient of itself to keep him there; for at first he had resolved whatever happened not to return to London until he knew that Miss Heathcote should have left it.

When once away from her presence, though still under the spell of his passion for her, he was better able to take a calmer view of his own conduct than he had been when in the habit of meeting her almost daily, and he acknowledged that duty and honour alike forbade him again to seek her society; he did not think that he had gained her affection, but he might have done so; he had done his best to make her care for him, and to let her think that he loved her.

This last was indeed too true; he did love her, as this selfish man of the world

had never loved before, with a passionate admiration of her beauty, grace, and gentleness. But what right had he to do so? His love for her was desecration, was a sin towards her for whom he felt it and towards another.

His thoughts rose no higher than this; he did not reflect that his passion for Lina was also a sin in the sight of heaven; but he acted according to his light, and, to do him justice, he did feel some compunction in that he had allowed an innocent young girl to receive attentions from him, and to listen to words which, situated as he was, should never have been spoken; the remembrance of which, if ever she came to know the truth, must make her cheeks burn with shame.

The latent generosity in his nature is awakened; he determines that he will keep away from the syren who has en-

chanted him, so that she may have no further cause to suffer through him, even if he can make no reparation for the past. But alas! for the infirmity of human will when the flesh is weak, all these good resolves were blown to the winds by the merest trifle.

In a copy of the *Times* one day appeared a paragraph calling attention to the fact that Miss Madeline Vernon was to make her last appearance at two farewell concerts, and warning the public that this might be the only opportunity of again hearing the popular favourite, as she had decidedly announced her intention of retiring into private life after her one brief but brilliant season.

Captain Charteris read this paragraph at the moment when he had been told that his father was sufficiently restored to health for him to leave home did he so

please, and the temptation now put before him was too strong for his weak nature to resist; there would be time enough for him to reach London for the first of the two named concerts, and he *must* see her once more. He need not speak to her—that would be better not, perhaps; and he felt a qualm of conscience as he recollected his prudent resolves. But at any rate he might send her some little parting present as a remembrance of their friendship—nothing more; merely see her face, and listen once again to that glorious voice.

There was no time for irresolution; he must start directly if he wished to reach town before the evening on which the concert was to take place; so, calling one of his sisters, he bade her tell his mother that he had decided upon going up to London for a few days, but would very

probably return at the end of the week, and if any change for the worse took place in his father's state he must be telegraphed for.

Thus it happened that whilst Lina congratulated herself on the fact that she had no longer cause to fear another meeting with the man who had so strangely fascinated her, but whose presence she had learnt to dread with an undefined terror, he was in fact hurrying back to see her, and every hour brought him nearer to her, though she knew it not.

The heat still continued oppressive, and all that afternoon Lina had rested in a quiet shaded room at the back of the house, where Mrs. Hammond had installed her to prepare for the evening's fatigue, for she took great care of her guest, and wished the two closing concerts to be as brilliant as their predecessors had been,

for she felt that a great part of Miss Madeline Vernon's success reflected upon herself as having been its chief promoter.

When Lina went upstairs to dress for the evening, a large packet carefully arranged in white paper lay on the table. She opened it curiously, anxious to see the contents, and a magnificent bouquet of the most delicate and rarest flowers met her delighted gaze.

"How lovely they are!" she exclaimed to her maid. "Do you know who sent them here, Rogers?"

"No, miss; but I believe a gentleman called at the door with the parcel, and said they were to be given to you, so I brought them up here as I thought you would be coming up soon. But see, miss, this card has dropped," and she handed to her mistress one that bore the name of Captain Charteris.

Lina took it, laid it on the table by the flowers; but all her pleasure in their beauty was gone. He had come back then, and she should be obliged to see him again, perhaps to be reminded of the foolish, meaningless words she had used in order to pacify him during their last meeting; and she began pulling impatiently at the paper which held the flowers whilst Rogers dressed her hair.

She felt something harder than the stalks, and tearing off the covering, saw, to her surprise and vexation, a costly jewelled bouquet-holder, evidently of great value and beauty as a work of art. She was excessively annoyed, and longed to yield to her first impulse of immediately returning the unwelcome gift, but resolved to consult Mrs. Hammond before taking any measures; so dismissing her maid as speedily as possible, she sent her down-

stairs to request that lady to come up to her for a few minutes before dinner.

“ This is very rude of me,” she said, as Mrs. Hammond came in, “ but I knew you would not mind coming, and I did not want to bring this down. Look what has been sent me, and then tell me what I am to do with it.”

“ With that splendid bouquet, child? why, keep it, to be sure; it is not the first you have received by a long way, though I think it is certainly the finest.”

“ Yes, but see this, Mrs. Hammond,” and she showed her the holder, with the card which had accompanied it.

“ This will not do, Lina,” the elder lady said, looking very grave; “ I am surprised at Captain Charteris, who was, I thought, too much of a gentleman to send you such a present as this. Of course you will not accept it?”

"I have no intention of doing so; on the contrary, I want to know whether you think I may send it back at once."

"Would not that be rather an insult to him?" asked the hostess, dubiously.

"Has not he insulted me by offering me such a gift? What right has Captain Charteris to suppose that I will take such valuable presents from him? I call it a gross insult to send a girl such a thing as this is," she said indignantly.

"He has not intended it as such, my dear Lina, you may be quite sure; so I do not think you ought to affront him by supposing that he did, though it would not be right in you to keep the holder. Wait until to-morrow; if he is in town, as I conclude he must be, he will certainly appear at the concert to-night, when you can tell him your intention of returning his present. If you do not see him, you

can send it back to-morrow, though where to I do not know, as the only address we have is that of his club."

"I can send it there ; it will only make a very small packet."

"And what will you do with the flowers?"

"Put them in water, the poor harmless beauties ; but certainly not carry them with me to-night."

"I suppose you are right, but it does seem a pity to let them be wasted," said Mrs. Hammond, regretfully.

"They shall not be wasted, for we will put them in your pretty drawing-room," Lina answered with a smile, as the two ladies descended together at the sound of the dinner-bell.

The first half of the concert was over, the interval between the parts had nearly passed, and still Captain Charteris had

not made his appearance in the room apportioned to the singers; and Lina began to breathe more freely as she thought it possible that he was still remaining in Scotland, when she should thus be spared the ordeal of another meeting with him.

Nevertheless she kept nervously glancing towards the door now and then, whilst the friends with whom she was talking could see that her attention wandered from them, and that something unusual was troubling her; at length she started visibly, at the same time changing colour, but she tried to hide her confusion by continuing to keep up the conversation more rapidly than before. It was of no use, however, for she felt that those dark eyes were bent upon her, constraining her to turn her head and meet their look of reproach; she

bowed coldly, and the angry frown which he tried in vain to hide as he approached her did not tend to reassure her.

As usual, the gentleman who was speaking to her immediately made way for Captain Charteris, and Lina felt annoyed, as if he were assuming that the new-comer had a right to her exclusive society which no one else possessed, and she would willingly have detained him by her side, but he moved away.

Captain Charteris sat down so that he could speak in a low tone of voice, intended for his companion only. He was very pale, and the angry expression on his face seemed to contend with the pleasure he could not conceal on being once again by Lina's side.

"Am I to be received without a word of welcome, then, as well as to find my offering of friendship rejected?" he asked.

"I can hardly be expected to welcome you very cordially to-night, when only a few hours have passed since I was annoyed by the receipt of a gift you had no right to send me, Captain Charteris."

"Then I am right; you did receive my present in time, but disdained to accept it," and the angry frown deepened.

"Disdain is scarcely the word to use; I am sensible of your great generosity in sending me so handsome a present, but it is utterly out of my power to accept it, and I shall return it to you to-morrow. You made a mistake when you sent it to me," and she laid a slight emphasis on the last word, which he understood.

"You cannot have thought, Miss Heathcote, that I intended to insult you," he exclaimed eagerly.

"It does not look unlike it when a

gentleman offers such a handsome, costly present to a girl in my position, who has given him no right to suppose that it will be acceptable," she answered quietly.

"No right! do you think our past intimacy and friendship give me no right to offer you some token in remembrance of them before we part, perhaps never to meet again?"

"Friendship," repeated Lina, scornfully, "that dates some three months back, commenced under the false pretext that you had known me long and well before we met in London."

"Your words were kinder than these the last time we met, Miss Heathcote," he said meaningly.

"And it is kind of you—generous too, to remind me of them, Captain Charteris. Thank you for this further proof of your 'friendship.'"

"It is for such a reception as this, then, that I have left my father's sick bed, travelling day and night in order to be here in time for this evening—fool that I have been! I could not resist coming to see you once more, and I vainly fancied that it might be some slight gratification to you; but I find that, short as my absence has been, it has sufficed for you to forget me."

"Indeed you are wrong," said Lina, partly softened by the evident earnestness of his manner; "I have not forgotten you in the least, but I was too much vexed by what happened this afternoon to think of anything else."

"But at least you will do me the justice to admit that you were wrong in the motive you attributed to my little gift?"

She bowed her head in acquiescence, and he continued, "Then I may venture to believe that if it had not been for my unfortunate mistake I might have received a slightly less chilling reception this evening?"

Lina could not help smiling. "I must say that I have endeavoured to make myself as disagreeable as possible to you; but, on condition that you will take back the bouquet-holder without another word, I will consent to forget that it was ever sent, that there may be peace between us for the future."

"Be it so; but are you aware, Miss Heathcote, that the future for us consists of the next two days? I mean," he added, seeing her look of inquiry, "that after you leave London the fates render it improbable that we shall meet again."

He was looking into her sweet, pure face as he spoke, but her voice did not falter as she replied calmly, "Yes; I always knew it was unlikely I should ever see you again after this spring."

"And you do not regret it," he said, with a sigh; "you are happier than I am, for there are times when I feel tempted to wish I had never seen your face, intense though the pleasure has been whilst it lasted. But I see it is your turn to sing now, so I will leave you for the present; you will let me assert my old privilege, though, of escorting you to the carriage, it will only be for once more after to-night?"

Lina assented, and he left her, conscious that all the old madness was upon him again; that if he did not keep strict guard over himself, his wild passion for this lovely girl might yet lead him to

the commission of some act of folly, of which he must bitterly repent hereafter. He was, however, more than ever conscious that no particle of affection for himself existed in her mind; and over this fact he rejoiced, for he was not at heart a bad man, only intensely weak and selfish, engrossed thoroughly, for the time being, by the strongest passion that had ever taken possession of his shallow nature; that had, in fact, completely gained the mastery over his senses, rendering him reckless as to the consequences of its sinful indulgence.

CHAPTER IX.

HOMeward BOUND.

“Our very hopes belied our fears—our fears belied our hopes.”

THE good ship “Goldfinder” had made a passage of unprecedented speed, and with fair weather and favourable winds she was now approaching the shores of old England many days before the earliest date at which it had been deemed possible for her to arrive.

The voyage, as is usual when accomplished under such circumstances, had been an uneventful one, consequently it was declared monotonous in the highest degree by some of the passengers, though

the two sisters in whom we are interested had not found it so, for they had formed one or two pleasant friendships on board which they hoped to continue in after years, and which had greatly tended to the enjoyment of the homeward voyage. They were to part from their new friends on landing, as their destinations lay in different parts of the kingdom; but they had already discussed plans for meeting again in the future, receiving and giving invitations to their respective homes, when the pleasant converse of the last three months should be renewed.

It was the evening of Tuesday, the 19th July, on which the vessel neared Southampton; and as she slowly sailed towards the port, a little group was gathered on her deck, watching alternately the brilliant rays of the declining sun, which lit up as a sea of fire that

slumbering ocean over which they had safely passed, and wistfully gazing at the shores of home, where the loved faces of those they had left would soon be seen again.

To some, indeed, this return to their native land was not a thing of unmixed joy, but was fraught with the sorrowful remembrance that now there were blank spaces in the family circle they had left, which could never more be filled save with the phantoms of the past; to all there must be the uncertainty of what the last few months might have brought to the dear ones at home, and the doubt whether sickness or trouble might not have been busy in their midst since the latest news had reached them from England.

So it happened that, though but a few hours previously all had been talking

joyfully of the coming meetings with those friends and relations who were on the watch for their arrival, of the surprise and pleasure which their unexpected appearance so long before the time would cause; whilst some were engaged in speculating whether the vessel had been telegraphed as off port, so that their arrival might be looked for; all this eager, animated conversation had now come to an end, and a quiet, almost solemn stillness had settled down upon all. The little group consisted of Gertrude, Alice, and the friends from whom they were so speedily to part, and with whom they were exchanging what were almost last words, as they expected in another half-hour to land at Southampton.

Presently their friends moved away to speak to some of their fellow-passengers, and the sisters were alone. It would be

hardly possible at the first cursory glance to recognise in Gertrude the pale, delicate figure who had left the same place nine months previously, on what some of her friends had pronounced to be even a hopeless mission, but which had, as it seemed, proved of almost miraculous effect. The pale face now bore the marks of the most perfect and radiant health, the thin form was rounded and firm, threatening, in fact, Alice declared, to become much too stout in time, whilst the change which renewed health had wrought in her personal charms was wonderful ; it had never before been known that Gertrude was so bright and pretty.

The younger sister felt how very much they had both to be thankful for in the different but happy results which each had experienced from their long voyage and sojourn from home ; Gertrude was not only restored to health, but her appearance was

so greatly improved, that surely her selfish husband must notice it ; and if he could not appreciate her gentle devotion to himself, he might be pleased to see that his wife possessed a fair share of the good looks which he admired so much in women.

For Alice, having read her brother-in-law's character with tolerable discrimination, felt pretty certain that he would have treated his wife with less indifference had she been gifted with beauty as well as riches, and she rejoiced on this account to see that in her youngest and best days, before ill-health had done its work, Gertrude had never looked so fair as she did now. For herself Alice was filled with a quiet happiness, which nothing she thought could take away ; for to her, too, had come joy so great that she almost failed to realize it at times, declaring that all which had happened to her since she left England

was but the disordered fancy of her brain, so strange did it seem that in that far-off land she should meet him whose love she prized, who had never ceased to think of her as his own, and who in a few brief weeks would follow her home never to part from her again.

She had no fear as to obtaining her father's consent now that she knew the real facts of Malcolm's history; for he came no longer as a poor man, but as one who had a right to claim his bride from the highest rank in the land, did he so please; for she knew that in point of blood her own family could not compete with that of the Dalglishes of Cumberstone.

She had promised Malcolm that as soon as she had explained matters fully to her parents she would commence preparations for their wedding, in order that it might take place soon after his arrival in England;

for upon her remonstrating with him on his impatience, he had pleaded the length of their separation as an excuse for wishing to have her all to himself without any further delay, reminding her that for more than two years he had never seen her face, living all that time on hope, so that she could not have the cruelty now to keep him waiting.

The only difficulty which troubled Mr. Dalglish was that he had at present no home to which to take his bride; but if they were married late in the autumn they could spend the winter months in travelling, and the estate would be his own again for immediate possession in January. To these plans Alice had agreed, and it was of the eventful past that her thoughts were full, as she stood watching the fast-sinking sun from the deck of the "Goldfinder" on that bright July evening.

“What has made us all so quiet, Alice? no one would imagine we were just reaching home,” remarked Gertrude.

“Would they not?” Alice roused herself from her reverie, “I do not know that either, for coming home after such a long absence as ours has been is rather a solemn thing, I think, Gertrude. Who knows what changes have occurred in our own homes since last we heard from them? Our friend Mrs. Curry, for instance, expects to hear of the death of her mother as the first news to greet her on landing to-night, and though she knows it is almost a certainty, you cannot be surprised that she and her husband should feel rather sad about it. Many changes of which we cannot tell the nature may have come to any of us during our absence, and the knowledge of this must make us feel a little anxious.”

"But we had not heard of any one being ill when they wrote to us last."

"Which was seven months ago, you know," Alice returned, smiling at her sister's simplicity; "there has been time for a great deal to happen since then."

"But you do not think any one is ill?" asked Gertrude, the ready tears filling her eyes.

"Why, what a silly little goose; of course I do not want to anticipate evils, only you asked me why we all looked so grave, and I gave you the most probable solution. Come and sit down by me; we will watch for the steam-tug that comes to take us on shore."

"You have frightened me, Alice; I shall not be satisfied that there is nothing wrong unless I see Bertram on board the steamer."

"Then you will do very wrong, Gertrude," said her sister, rather sternly; "you

know quite well how unlikely it is that he can have heard of our being sighted, and he would not be on the look-out for us as we have come so much sooner than was expected. It is next to impossible that he can come to meet us, especially if he is up in Scotland, as you think he may be. You know we shall surprise them all by coming home now, when we are not expected for another ten days, and they will hardly have begun to think about us at all yet."

"Bertram will surely be watching for news of the ship; and if he sees that we have been telegraphed he will very likely come down to Southampton and wait for us there," said his wife.

Alice did not answer, for she thought it highly improbable that her brother-in-law would forsake the pleasures of town life in the season, to wait at Southampton for an indefinite time; but she would not

hurt her sister's feelings by expressing any doubt as to her husband's anxiety to meet her. And at this moment they were joined by Captain Murray, to whom Gertrude appealed as to the likelihood of their arrival being anticipated.

"I really cannot tell positively," he answered; "but it was so hazy when we passed the Needles that I think it more than doubtful whether our signals were seen or not. At any rate your friends could not expect to see you this week, so it is hardly likely that any of them will be here to meet you to-day. What are you thinking of doing, Miss Stephenson?" He addressed himself to her as the ruling spirit, well knowing that to her share would fall any arrangements they might make respecting their landing.

"As it is so late we think we had better go to an hotel for the night, and telegraph

home to say we shall be in London to-morrow. We can manage very well; it seems a pity to go on travelling now and arrive home in the middle of the night. The Currys are not going up to town, or else we might have arranged to accompany them."

"I shall be very glad to render you any assistance in my power, but I am afraid I shall not be able to get on shore just yet, for though the pilot relieves me of my duties, I must be here until the last of my passengers has departed. Should you object to remaining on board for another hour or so, until I can see you safely on shore to the hotel myself? I do not like the idea of two ladies landing quite by themselves, and as you have been under my care I should like to put you in safety on English *terra firma* again. I may be of some use to you also in sending messages to your friends."

Both sisters expressed their thanks and satisfaction for this proposal, which would relieve them from any difficulty they might otherwise experience, and they took this opportunity of again renewing their warmest thanks to Captain Murray for his constant and attentive kindness during their two long voyages.

“Any little kindness I have been able to show you has been well repaid by the wonderful improvement which has been effected in my fair passengers,” he said, in reply to all their compliments.

“I am sure I do not feel like the same creature I did when I left England, and I doubt if Bertram will know me,” was Gertrude’s remark; “yet I was so unwilling to come—I could not bear leaving home.”

“Now you have the pleasure of returning to it, its charms will appear of double value.”

“That would hardly be possible in your case, I suppose,” Alice laughingly remarked, as he turned to leave them, for the little steamer which was to bear away the passengers and their luggage was coming alongside, and the Captain’s presence was required elsewhere.

Now commenced a scene of bustle and confusion, during which the sisters remained passive spectators, bidding farewell to their fellow-passengers, exchanging good wishes with all, and hopes of future meetings with some, until at length all was over, and the last adieux waved by their friends, the Currys, as they stood on the little steamer, which quickly glided away to the pier.

Both Gertrude and Alice had confessed to a slight feeling of disappointment as they scanned the faces of those who came on board, seeing at a glance that no

friendly welcome awaited them from amongst the little throng, though they well knew the extreme improbability, to say the least, of their arrival off the coast having become known to any of their own family, still they discovered that they had secretly treasured a little hope that it might be otherwise, and Alice was obliged to have recourse to scolding her sister in order to raise her own spirits.

This only lasted a short time however, for, true to his promise, Alan was ready to escort them on shore, and by ten o'clock he had left them comfortably located at their hotel, with the promise that he would return early in the morning to see of what assistance he could be to them in leaving Southampton. They had agreed not to disturb their parents with the news of their arrival that night, as Mrs. Stevenson was apt to be somewhat

alarmed on the receipt of a telegram ; but one was prepared, which Captain Murray was to send off the first thing on the following morning as he passed the station.

One was despatched also by Gertrude to her husband at his club, as, having established himself in bachelor quarters during her absence, she thought this the most effectual means of securing his receiving it, if he were in London at all at present. This also Captain Murray undertook to send on the morrow: it merely contained the words, "We have arrived safely, and shall be in Seymour Street to-day," and it bore the address of the Hon. Lionel Bertram Charteris. That gentleman, as it happened however, did not visit his club that day, and the telegram was not received.

CHAPTER X.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

"As high as we have mounted in delight,
In our dejection do we sink as low."

ALAN MURRAY on leaving the two ladies made his way to the lodging where he stayed when in Southampton, and where he was well-known and always welcomed by the worthy landlady. He had sent a message to her earlier in the evening, so that his presence was expected, and his room prepared when he arrived.

He was not sorry to be in the little parlour once more, for in truth he had

never landed with a lighter heart or with happier prospects than now, and he felt inclined to welcome the homely landlady as if her house were the Paradise to which his fancy was already straying in the future, though the presiding genius was not such as his imagination pictured her.

He did not intend to announce his arrival at all, but to start for Tenbrook directly he was able to leave his ship, which he could do, in charge of the mate in a very few days' time, when he should have the delight of surprising his mother and Lina by his unexpected appearance, perhaps coming suddenly upon them as they were at work in the little garden, or seated under the lime tree, Lina reading aloud as the old lady busied herself knitting stockings for her son.

It was a pleasant picture whichever way he looked at it; and then Lina would

pretend to be shy with him at first, no doubt, remembering what she was to tell him on his return home this time, keeping out of his way, hiding herself from him, and looking demurely the other way when she spoke to him ; but he would soon find an opportunity of taking her unawares, then would come that delightful, half-whispered confession from the sweetest lips in the world, and she would be his promised wife. For it had not entered his head to doubt her affection for him, though he had been unwilling to bind her by any promise until his return home.

He would give up the sea, he had given it up in fact, for he had made his last voyage now, and should settle down to quiet domestic life as soon as he could get anything to do, which would be before very long he was sure ; and then what a dear little wife he should have, with a

comfortable home to offer his mother if she chose to come and live with him.

He sat late indulging in these pleasant thoughts, till it struck him that as he must be on board his ship again early in the morning, he had better make the most of his time in the unwonted luxury of an English bed, and he accordingly retired to rest, to dream of Lina Heathcote, and her delighted surprise on seeing him again.

When Alan came down in the morning he was much astonished to find a letter awaiting him in his mother's handwriting, as he had considered it quite impossible that she could have received any intimation as to the chance of his early arrival in England, and he therefore opened it in much curiosity. The enigma was a very simple one after all.

An old friend of his own calling on

Mrs. Murray, had told that lady that the "Goldfinder" had been spoken at a certain date, which showed that she was making an unusually rapid passage, that according to his calculations, if she continued to make the voyage under the same favourable winds, it was just possible she might arrive at Southampton about the 22nd, though it was so highly improbable that he strongly advised Mrs. Murray not to set her heart upon the prospect of seeing her son so soon.

But acting on a sudden idea she wrote to Alan to tell him that Lina was still in London, had been there, in fact, ever since the winter, and had at last fixed upon the 22nd as the date for returning home. Now supposing that by any chance he had arrived at Southampton before that date, how pleasant a surprise it would be to Lina if Alan were to appear

on the scene in time to escort her back to Tenbrook. She wrote, therefore, these few lines just to tell her son, but she should take care and not let Lina know what she had done, as the pleasure of his coming would be spoilt did she look forward to it only to be disappointed. He would be surprised to find how long her absence had lasted, but she had been enjoying herself greatly, and it was a pity for her not to stay as long as she could with the Hammonds, as they had been so kind to her; whilst as for his mother, Alan must not mind about her for she was as well as possible, and her niece Mary had been staying with her the whole time.

Alan's face grew troubled as he read this letter. He knew that Lina had gone to London early in the year on a short visit of a few weeks, and he had not been over pleased to hear it, as he remembered

her promise to remain with his mother during his absence; but he had made excuses for her on hearing that she was not well, that she was in need of a change, and had been strongly urged to it by Mrs. Murray herself. This had been the news he received in his last letter before he left Melbourne, but what was the meaning of her prolonged absence from home?

It was five or six months since she had gone to stay with Mrs. Hammond; what could possibly have kept her in London all that time? It certainly could not have been on account of her health, or his mother would not have written in the way she did about her visit, which was certainly one entirely of pleasure. He was surprised that Lina should choose to absent herself for so long a period from home, but he supposed that his mother, with her usual good-nature, had urged her to remain

... that the amuse-
... with them were
... longed for at her
... not be procured in
... town.

... the little card house he
... the night before fell to the
... feeling that very possibly the
... he had had of London plea-
... have in some degree unfitted
... the quiet life of domestic happi-
... he had pictured to himself; he
... in fact, like the turn affairs had
... but he must manage to carry out
... mother's suggestion, and arrange a
... with Lina that they might return
... to Tenbrook.

He could not get away from his ship
... Saturday he knew, but he would
... write to her at the address his mother
... sent him, asking her to delay her

journey for a day; but then he would miss the pleasure of seeing her surprise and joy when he unexpectedly presented himself before her, and this he was very unwilling to do.

Better still if he were to run up to London that afternoon for a few hours, see Lina, and arrange to meet her on the following Saturday. His heart beat with the anticipation of coming happiness as he repeated to himself that he should see her again on that very day if all were well.

He hastily swallowed some breakfast, and sallied forth to make his arrangements for leaving Southampton that afternoon, to return early on the following morning, not forgetting on his way to despatch the two telegrams with which he had been entrusted, intending to pay his promised visit to the two ladies at their hotel as soon as his own business was completed.

CHAPTER XI.

WELCOME HOME.

“Enjoy the spring of love and youth,
To some good angel leave the rest,
For time will teach thee soon the truth,
There are no birds in last year’s nest.”

ALTHOUGH it was considerably past ten o’clock when Captain Murray walked into the sitting-room, he found Miss Stevenson just finishing breakfast, and pretending to be very much shocked on being detected in such bad habits immediately on her return to her native land.

“We wanted you here to keep disci-

pline, you see," she laughed. "No such hours as these were permitted on board the 'Goldfinder,' but directly we are freed from your tyrannical rule we resume our old habits."

"I thought you once assured me that you were always an early riser at home?"

"So I am ; but it does not follow that I find any one else ready to keep me company at breakfast, and as I do not like solitary meals, I generally curb my hunger until some of my fellow-mortals appear. How do you know, for instance, that I have not been roaming about this morn- for an hour or more?"

"Because in all probability I should have come in contact with you in that case, as I have already passed this hotel twice since I came out. I have been very busy this morning, Miss Stevenson."

"I am glad to find your business-like

habits do not desert you directly you come on shore. But will you not let me offer you some more breakfast; you have had quite time to get up an appetite since your own?"

"No, I thank you," he replied. "You forget that it is against rules to eat anything between meals; and, late as it is, I can hardly yet term this luncheon, I am afraid. But what has become of your sister? I trust she is not ill."

"We both overslept ourselves this morning, and I persuaded Gertrude to have her breakfast upstairs. Do you not think she is looking wonderfully well?" she added. "I am so anxious that her husband should see a great improvement in her."

"He cannot fail to do so. Mrs. Charteris's recovery seems to me almost mar-

vellous, for to confess the truth, as I may safely do now to you, I hardly thought she would get better when I saw her for the first time as she came on board the ship. She looked so wasted with ill-health, and seemed so out of spirits too. I remember feeling much astonished to find that her husband was not going to accompany her, when I saw how doubtful it seemed whether he might not be losing her for ever. You are looking better for the voyage, too; I think the air of Melbourne must have exercised some charm upon you, for you were not so well when you first landed there, if I recollect rightly." His eyes sparkled mischievously as he saw her colour rising at his last words.

"Now, I will not have any impertinent compliments," Alice said, laughing.
"You always will pretend you do not

believe in that, because it took you so much by surprise."

"Believe in what?" asked Alan, with affected innocence.

"In my engagement," she returned. "You seemed to think that Mr. Dalglish was the Wandering Jew, or some other strange being dropped suddenly from the clouds into our midst, and I do not believe you ever learnt to regard him as a rational being."

"Indeed, Miss Stevenson, I look upon Mr. Dalglish as a gentleman of the greatest discernment, as well as being one of the most fortunate of mortals. But I think you are rather too severe upon me; you ought to make allowances for the shock I received on entering the room that memorable day, to find a gentleman of whose existence I had never heard, seated at table in the most

friendly and confidential manner with the two young ladies who had been expressly committed to my charge. I assure you, Miss Stevenson, that if I had not instinctively read the truth in your speaking countenance, I should have felt bound to collar the intruder on the spot."

"What nonsense you talk, Captain Murray! Then, when you saw how matters really were, I suppose, as you had never seen him before, you thought it had been a genuine case of love at first sight?" questioned Alice.

"How could I doubt it, when I knew the potency of the fair lady's charms," he replied with mock gallantry.

"Take care! If you make pretty speeches to me I shall report you to Miss Heathcote; and that reminds me that I have a favour to ask of you, Captain Murray, before we part, which is nothing

less than that you will spare me one of those photographs. I know you have at least half-a-dozen, which you can get replenished at any time; and I have taken such a strong fancy to the face that I ask it from real interest, not mere curiosity."

"You shall have one with pleasure," Alan said, his honest face glowing with pride as he handed the photographs to Alice for her selection, not a bit abashed when she teased him with having them always ready for inspection on the shortest notice.

"It is a lovely face," she said, heartily; "and very pleased I shall be when I can make the acquaintance of the original, which you have promised shall be as soon as possible. You must not forget that you have accepted an invitation to my wedding, and I shall be very disappointed if you come alone."

"It shall not be my own fault if I do; but I must not make any rash promises at present. I want now to hear at what time you intend starting for town, as I find I am obliged to go up myself this afternoon; but that probably will be too late for you?"

"I thought you could not leave here until the end of the week," said Alice, disregarding the implied question.

"I am only going up for the night, returning to my post to-morrow morning."

"Then you will come home with us? Papa will be only too pleased to see you; and we will wait and travel up to town with you."

"I shall be delighted if you will do so; but I must decline your kind invitation for to-day, as I am going up purposely to see some friends; in fact, the truth is, I hear Miss Heathcote is in London, and I

am going to arrange with her as to her return home with me on Saturday."

"Ah, indeed! I thought there was something mysterious in your hurried visit to London. Well, I am very glad you are to have the pleasure of seeing her so soon; but now I must run up to ask Gertrude if she is willing to wait until the afternoon train."

Alice had not much difficulty in persuading her sister to wait till they could avail themselves of Captain Murray's escort on their journey, when she found that they were already too late for the morning train, and that the next one would only allow of their reaching London a couple of hours or so before the time at which they would arrive did they wait for their friend.

The only feature in this arrangement which did not quite satisfy them was that

Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson would be kept in hourly expectation of their arrival, so they decided to send another telegraphic message, stating their intention of delaying their journey till the afternoon in order to travel under Captain Murray's care.

Gertrude was afraid her parents would think they had grown very helpless during their absence if they could not manage, in company with their maid, to undertake so short a distance by themselves, but she admitted it would be pleasanter to travel with a gentleman. She was all impatience to meet her husband, though quite prepared to find that he was not in London at present ; as she knew from experience that, owing to his father's constant attacks of illness, he was liable at any moment to be summoned either to Scotland or the estate in the north, at whichever place the Mountfords happened to be located at the

time, as the old man on these occasions invariably believed himself to be dying, and sent for his son, whom he detained an unwilling prisoner until all danger was over.

Gertrude, as we have said, continued to entertain the belief that her husband was as fondly attached to her as she was to him; and though she had been much hurt by the unfeeling coldness of the two or three letters she had received from him during her stay in Melbourne, she had long since forgotten them, and under the influence of her strong enduring love, was now completely happy in the prospect of being so soon restored to him.

Alice could not refrain from a feeling of compassion not unmingled with misgiving, as she sat watching her sister's happy, untroubled countenance on their journey up to London, for it had often occurred to

her mind that this prolonged absence on the part of his wife, might have tended fatally to loosen the already slender tie which bound him to her, and that his indifference might at last force itself on her notice by the growing estrangement which would ensue.

She could never believe that the marriage had originated in affection on the part of her brother-in-law, or from any other motive than the desire to benefit by the wealth his wife had brought him; and as she had seen how little power Gertrude's gentle nature had to awaken his affection she had not much hope that her return home would be welcomed in such a manner as to satisfy the wife's loving heart.

It was late when they reached the London terminus; but the sisters both insisted upon Alan's accompanying them

to Seymour Street; as having brought them so far on their way, they declared his duty would not be efficiently discharged unless he delivered them safely into their father's hands, though they would not long detain him from his very particular engagement, Alice added maliciously.

They became quite silent as they drew near their home, their hearts filled with quiet thankfulness for the many blessings they had received, in the safety with which they had performed their long voyage, the happy attainment of the purpose for which they had left their home, and of the joyful meeting with all the dear ones they were so soon to see after so many months of separation. At length Seymour Street is reached, and they are once more at home. Alan remains outside under pretence of looking after the various small packages which the two girls in their haste had left

inside the fly; but he will not intrude upon the first sacred meeting between parents and children, restored to each other after the many vicissitudes to which the past year had exposed them; he is thinking, too, of another meeting to take place during the course of the evening, at which he hopes there will be no spectators present.

As Alan entered the hall, a servant relieving him of his packages, he heard Alice saying, "Captain Murray is here, papa, but he cannot stay;" and Mr. Stevenson came out to welcome him, his voice trembling with emotion as he thanked the young sailor again and again for all his attentive kindness to his two daughters. He expressed the greatest satisfaction at the marked improvement in Gertrude, regretting only that her husband was not there to meet her, a fact which Alan had noted the instant he entered the

room, as he saw the cloud of disappointment already settling down on her face, even in the midst of her happy reception by her parents.

"We do not know where he is," Mrs. Stevenson was saying, after she too had warmly expressed her thanks to Alan; "for we have heard nothing of him lately, but as Lord Mountford is so much better it is hardly likely that Bertram is still in Scotland. Your papa sent a telegram to him on the chance of his being there, however; but I am afraid, my child, you will not see him until to-morrow."

"But I sent to his club; if he were in London he would have received my message and have been here before now," said Gertrude.

"He is perhaps staying with some friends; you know he could not have expected us to arrive before another week,

so I dare say he will not have been prepared to be in London just yet. You will see him to-morrow, and in the meantime papa and mama will have you all to themselves," Alice said cheerfully, though really feeling much sympathy with her sister's disappointment.

Mr. Stevenson tried to persuade Captain Murray to remain with them, but this he was unable to do, owing, as Alice informed her father, to an important engagement which had been made before they sailed from England, and in order to keep which he had brought them home in such an unusually short space of time, quite risking their lives in fact by his own imprudence in putting on so much extra sail whenever the wind threatened to blow a gale.

"I must run away, Miss Stevenson, before you expose your profound ignorance on nautical affairs, for it is very evi-

dent you have not profited by any of my instructions," Alan said, laughing, though somewhat confused by her raillery.

He took his leave amidst a profusion of almost overwhelming thanks from all the party, friendly regrets at parting from the two young ladies, and a warmly expressed invitation to visit them both in London and at their country house.

CHAPTER XII.

ALAN'S DISCOVERY.

"The world is filled with folly and sin,
And love must cling where it can, I say ;
For beauty is easy enough to win,
But one isn't loved every day."

WITH a light step Alan regained the fly which had been in waiting for him, ordered the man to drive him to an hotel not far distant from Mr. Hammond's house, and abandoned himself to the delicious anticipation of his coming happiness. It was past eight o'clock, rather late to present himself at the house of a stranger, certainly, but he must return to Southampton in the morning, so there

was no help for it. And he did not particularly wish to see Mrs. Hammond either; his visit was to her guest, and Lina must apologise for his untimely appearance.

Having engaged a room at the hotel, and deposited his portmanteau, he walked towards the house to which he had been directed, his heart beating quite nervously as he rang the bell, which was very foolish, as he told himself, for he had often before now returned from sea to meet Lina, and she was no more dear to him now than she had been for many years past. But he had spoken to her of his love, he came in a different character this time, that was the reason of his unusual trepidation.

"Is Miss Heathcote at home?" he inquired when the door opened.

"No, sir," replied the man laconically.

"Can you tell me how soon she will be in, then?"

"About half-past ten, sir, I suppose; the concerts are generally over by that time."

"She has gone to a concert, then?" said Alan, disappointment in his tone.

"It is Miss Heathcote's last night, sir; her farewell performance," the man said, in some surprise at the ignorance of his questioner; but his surprise was still further increased when he saw the look in Alan's face. "Perhaps you did not know," he explained, "that she is Miss Madeline Vernon. I will get you one of the notices, if you will have the goodness to step inside."

"Thank you, I will wait here," was the short reply.

The man seemed rather dubious about this strange individual, but a further

inspection convinced him that he might be trusted on the doorstep for a moment; so he departed in search of the programme of that evening's concert. The stranger had not stirred when he returned, had not apparently raised his eyes from the ground; but when the man looked at him he was startled to see a change in his face which was noticeable even to his unobservant gaze.

"Here is the paper, sir," he said, respectfully.

Alan took it, thrusting it into his pocket as if he could there hide it from his memory as from his sight. One more question he asked,—

"You said this was Miss Heathcote's last concert; has she been singing much, then, in public?"

"Oh yes, sir; all this season. She began almost as soon as she came up to

stay with my mistress. Her singing has been quite a wonderful success. All the papers have written about her."

"I have been out of England, or I dare say I should have heard of it. Thank you, and good evening." Alan turned to leave the house.

"What name shall I say?" inquired the servant, mindful of his duty.

"It does not signify; I will call again perhaps," and he was gone.

"A queer sort of gent he was; most likely some old sweetheart of Miss Heathcote's, I should say," was the verdict of the butler, as he retailed the circumstances to his fellow-servants afterwards.

Alan walked on for a few paces as if he had received some sudden blow, and were reeling from the effects of the shock; but remembering the programme which the man-servant had given him he drew it

from his pocket, glanced at it to see the name of the hall at which the concert was to take place, and summoning a cab which chanced to be at hand, he drove there without allowing himself time to collect his thoughts.

The mystery was solved now ; at any rate there could be no more doubt as to why Lina had remained all these months in London, but he felt pretty certain his mother was as ignorant of her conduct as he had been himself, and he re-perused her letter as a confirmation of this fact.

The hall was soon reached ; Alan turned in at the first entrance to which he came, and demanded a ticket ; he was told that he would only find standing-room, but it was all one to him, he said, and he paid the sum required, passing on up the broad staircase.

At the summit he was accosted by an

individual who politely informed him that as he was not in a dress coat his presence would not be admissible in the part of the hall to which his ticket gave him access, so, annoyed at being deterred by so trifling an obstacle at such a moment, he turned back, and was conducted to a gallery higher up in the building.

It was all the same to him where he went ; he only wanted to be where he could hear her and see her face whilst remaining himself unseen ; then he would go back to Southampton without letting her know that he had been in London ; she should return by herself to Tenbrook, and he would see whether she still continued her course of deception by keeping her secret from him when they met. It was likely enough, he thought ; for having once learnt her lesson of deceit, it would be but too easy to continue its practice ;

probably she would ignore her present life altogether, inventing plausible excuses for prolonging her stay in London to such an unreasonable time, and flattering herself upon having so skilfully deceived Alan, until he should one day turn upon her, upbraiding her with her conduct.

When he took his place in the foremost row of the gallery, which he succeeded with some difficulty in doing, Alan was able to gather from the remarks of those about him that Miss Madeline Vernon had just been singing, and that she was only to appear once more during the evening. He looked at his programme ; three other pieces were to be performed before her song came, so he must be content to wait some little time before he saw her whom he had come to seek.

He looked around, and down on to the mass of people below, a great and fashion-

able crowd, all of whom had come to pay their farewell homage to the reigning favourite of the hour ; and as Alan gazed he asked himself was it possible that Lina had the courage, the boldness he called it, to face this numerous, highly-critical audience, singing before them all as she had so often done in the old days at home to please him alone.

Little heed did he pay to the artistes who preceded Lina ; but when it was time for her to appear, she herself would hardly have recognised her old friend and true love in the white-faced man who sat with motionless form, and a curious expression in his eyes, intently watching for the first glimpse of her face.

Suddenly, before she is visible to more than half the audience, as she advances on the platform, a deafening sound arises as the crowd welcomes the last appearance of

the young singer. She comes forward slowly, and with her usual graceful step, bowing low in acknowledgment of the greeting she receives, and takes her station in the front of the platform.

Perfectly self-possessed, yet modestly unassuming as in her quietest days at Tenbrook, Lina stands now in her hour of triumph, as fair and graceful a vision as ever gladdened the eyes of those present that night. She is thinner than when Alan saw her last, and in the daytime looks ill and worn, but excitement has given her a bright flush, whilst the rose in her beautiful hair, too, lends its hue to her cheek.

Her dress was entirely of white, composed of some soft floating material, displaying to advantage her exquisite figure, and not more pure in colour than her swan-like throat and neck, round which

she wore a circlet of precious stones, the gift of her kind friends the Hammonds.

Her song commenced, and every sound was hushed as the delicious warbling notes swelled forth, now filling the hall with their melody, now sinking to the faintest whisper, but ever enchanting the ear with their perfect harmony and sweetness. She had never sung so well, it was said; her voice was perfection, and she herself so charming; in short, the audience was enraptured, and all pronounced it the greatest treat they had enjoyed for years—all save one; and well was it for Madeline Vernon that she could not see the stern, severe gaze which fell on her from above, for had she done so, certain it is that her brilliant song would not have come to the same satisfactory termination.

There was no love, no admiration in

that look ; nothing but grave displeasure, with perhaps a shade of contempt for the girl who had wilfully sacrificed his love and respect to win the applause of a multitude such as this ; who was content to show forth her beauty in the eyes of all the world—that beauty of which he had been so proud, of which he had thought with a sort of reverence, that one of God’s creatures should be so fair to look upon.

Instinctively he felt that the lovely face had contributed in no small degree to the success she had achieved, and he shuddered as he recalled the words which she had once used with reference to the subject, truly predicting what might be if ever she attempted the life which she had so ardently longed to try before she made that fatal promise in which Alan had believed with all his trusting nature.

The song had ceased, and Lina was

repeatedly acknowledging the burst of applause which greeted its close, bowing gracefully on every side as she made her way off the stage ; but the audience would not be satisfied, they wanted to see her again ; she came back half-way, and playfully shaking her head in answer to an inquiry from the conductor, signified that it was not her intention to sing again that evening.

She had already given one encore, and was feeling tired, so she was determined to sing no more, though the enthusiasm of the audience had risen to the point of cheering at last ; and when she finally retired after taking one look all round the house, during which Alan sat breathless with fear lest even at that distance he should be recognised, it was some minutes before quiet was restored.

The demon of jealousy had now taken

possession of Alan's mind, for he had seen several handsome bouquets thrown at Lina's feet, two of which had apparently come from the same direction, and he fancied he had seen her glance wander that way even before the appearance of the flowers, which she had herself raised and carried away in her hands, with one of her sweetest smiles to the donor as she did so.

Alan was too little used to such scenes to know that they meant nothing, that the bouquets might have been thrown by the most indifferent amongst the spectators, so he pictured them as coming from one of Lina's perhaps favoured admirers, and the idea was one of agony to him, though he had but that moment told himself that he could never again entertain the slightest feeling of affection towards the girl who had broken her word to him.

She who had stood night after night in all her glorious beauty, submitting it to the curious or impertinent gaze of hundreds of spectators, could never again be his Lina; and the intense pain of that thought almost for a moment subdued his angry displeasure.

But that feeling quickly returned, as rising with a sudden movement which astonished and disconcerted his neighbours, he hastily made his exit from the concert-hall; for though the performance was not over he had no wish to remain to the end, and was only anxious to effect his escape from the hateful scene.

As Alan reached the street, where in the fresh night air he breathed more freely than in the heated atmosphere he had just quitted, he remembered that Lina would probably be leaving the hall by a private entrance at the same time; and

whether guided by instinct to her side, or whether the all-powerful love which he had felt for her was not so entirely crushed as he believed, it is certain that he found his way round to the side door by which she was to leave the building, and stood there watching for her with as much eagerness as if they were to meet as he had so fondly anticipated, though with what bitterness of feeling he alone could tell. He placed himself so that he could have a full view of all who came out without himself being seen, and through the glass doors he saw the brightly-lighted passage down which Lina must come if she had not already passed, which was scarcely likely, as he had lost no time in leaving the hall.

A neat brougham stood at the door, waiting, no doubt, for her. A few moments of anxious watching; then a lady

and gentleman appeared, whom Alan knew to be Mr. and Mrs. Hammond, followed at a little distance by Lina ; but ah ! how changed she is from the brilliant being who a short time since had dazzled the eyes of the multitude within. All colour had faded from her cheek, leaving it of a deadly pallor, her eyes shone with an unnatural brightness, and her face wore a scared look as of some frightened, hunted animal.

She leant on the arm of a gentleman who was bending over her, talking apparently in an earnest if not excited manner ; and once she shook her head as if in reply to him, but she did not speak. As they passed out through the inner door her dress caught on something, and they stopped to extricate it. At this moment Alan, whose glance had never wandered from Lina's face, turned to look at her

pression of his face never changed as answered, coldly : " Yes, Lina ; allow to hand you to the carriage ; " and her heart sank within her as she felt that her forebodings had been realized, and that she was lost to him for ever.

He placed her in the carriage without word, taking care to keep his head down, so that in the dim light his substitution for Lina's former companion might not be observed, and raising his hat as he muttered " Good evening," he hastily disappeared before the servant had time to close the door.

As the brougham drove off he turned to find Captain Charteris ; but that gentleman, considering discretion to be the better part of valour, had jumped into a hansom and was now quickly speeding away in the direction of his club, which he had just visited for two days, and where he would

find the telegram awaiting him which he should have received that morning.

Alan Murray stood for a few seconds irresolute ; then, with a bitter smile on his face as he walked away, he said to himself, " It must always be thus, I suppose ; the innocent to suffer for the faults of the guilty. For her sake I must let him go unchastised, and also for that poor little wife of his ; but—oh, my God ! shall I ever forget this night ? " and he put his hand to his head with a gesture as of physical pain as he disappeared in the crowded street.

How long or where he wandered to that night he could not tell ; but it was some hours before he returned, wearied and exhausted with fatigue, to the quiet hotel which he had chosen as being in such close proximity to Mrs. Hammond's house. It was eight o'clock when he had started out to seek Lina, picturing as he went

her delight and surprise at seeing him so unexpectedly ; his heart full to overflowing with the joy of meeting his darling again after the long months of their separation ; and now but very few hours had elapsed yet everything was changed.

His bright castle of hope and love lay scattered to atoms, not a remnant was left to him of the wreck, and the only course left to him now was to endeavour, as quickly as might be, to forget the ungrateful, deceitful girl who had caused him all this misery. He said this, but in his inmost heart he knew that it was as impossible for the sun to hide its light as it would be for him to put away from him the love which had grown with years, and whose roots were too firmly planted in his nature to be wrenched away but with life itself.

For the time it was dead indeed, for the trust and honour upon which it was

founded had been rudely torn from their place, leaving distrust and suspicion in their stead; but the love itself would revive, and this Alan knew, though he put aside the thought in the bitter anger of his present mood.

He returned to Southampton the following morning early, and immediately made arrangements to resume the command of his ship on her next voyage, as he felt that it would be impossible now for him to remain on shore, and he only regretted that he could not at once leave England, where the reception he had received had blasted all those eager hopes with which he had landed but two days previously.

He thought of Alice Stevenson, of the pleasant conversations he had enjoyed with her, and wondered what had induced him at quite an early period of their acquaintance to make a *confidante* of her in respect

to his attachment to Lina ; she had proved such a sympathizing listener, had taken such warm interest in all he said, and was so ready to be a kind friend to Lina, too, whenever they met. He almost wished he could see her again, ask her advice under the present altered circumstances ; but that would really be of no use, as he was quite determined what course to adopt. He should take Lina home on Saturday, because his mother would think it strange if he did not do so after receiving her letter, but never under any pretext would he make the slightest allusion to having been at the concert, or to anything connected with her stay in London.

It should be ignored by him altogether, and she would well understand his silence ; neither could he ever again speak to her on that other subject which had filled his mind with happy thoughts for many

months past, and that, too, she would understand.

He should only remain at home a very short time, and whilst there he would see as little of Lina as was possible, compatible with strict politeness to a guest of his mother's, for in that light only could he now regard her.

Luckily the "Goldfinder" was wanted to sail again directly on a voyage to Ceylon, so he would not have more than six weeks to spend at Tenbrook.

So argued the strong man in the strength of his deep and bitter resentment, but the hour of his weakness was at hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

FRIENDLY COUNSEL.

"Repentance is not to be measured by inches and hours."

LINA had sunk back in the carriage by the side of Mrs. Hammond, so completely overcome by the suddenness of her meeting with Alan, as well as by the complexity of her feelings, that she was utterly unable to speak or to make any reply to her friend's exclamation of surprise at the abrupt manner in which Captain Charteris had taken his leave.

Lina could not then undeceive her, and Mrs. Hammond, who, knowing that the girl was very far from well, had

been somewhat anxious as to the result of this farewell concert on her already overtaxed strength, did not attempt to annoy her with questions or remarks, but allowed the drive home to pass over in silence, and immediately they arrived at their own house she herself assisted in putting Lina to bed, insisting upon her being left to perfect quiet and rest for the night.

“You have been doing a great deal too much, child,” she said, “and I am to blame for it all. You would have had a serious illness, I believe, if this had gone on longer, and I shall not be happy until I know you are quiet in the country again with Mrs. Murray. I will send you up something to eat, which you must try to take, and tomorrow when you are better we will talk over the concert.”

Left to herself poor Lina burst into an agony of tears of bitter shame and remorse,

as she recalled that brief episode as she left the concert hall, which was fraught with so much misery to herself and others ; she would never she thought forget the expression of Alan's face as he spoke to her ; the contempt, the coldness of his voice were worse to bear than the keenest reproaches, coming from him who had never before addressed her but in tones of kindness and affection.

It had all taken place so suddenly that she had no means of excusing or of justifying herself, as she had intended doing when they met, and then too he must have put the worst construction upon her acquaintance with Captain Charteris, as from the manner in which he had pushed him aside, it was evident that Alan looked upon him as a favoured lover who had usurped the place which was his during his absence. That must have been the tenor of what he

whispered to Captain Charteris when he had grasped him so strangely by the arm; and though it was certainly rather a curious way of asserting his rights, she could hardly feel surprised at his indignation, especially if, as was possible, their conversation as they stood at the door had been overheard by Alan.

Her companion had been entreating for one more interview with the fair singer, before she disappeared altogether from the scene in which she had lately played so brilliant a part; but this Lina had steadily refused to grant; she had seen him the day before, and again she had been alarmed, she scarce knew why, by the strangeness of his manner, feeling an indescribable relief when the entrance of Mrs. Hammond had put an end to their interview.

That he was most deeply interested in her,

Lina could no longer doubt ; his words, looks, and manner alike proved that it was so ; but whilst he seemed ever to hover on the brink of an outspoken declaration of love, something appeared always to restrain him at the moment when his passion should have found vent in words.

Lina's great anxiety was to avoid an explanation of this kind ; she did not care for Captain Charteris in the least, though her vanity had been flattered from the first by his admiration, and she acknowledged that she had received his attentions in such a manner as to lead him falsely to suppose that he was not indifferent to her. In this she had acted very wrongly, but it was only one of the many things in which she now knew herself to blame during the last few months. Even had she unwillingly deceived Captain Char-

teris, her conduct towards him sunk into insignificance compared with her deception, her ingratitude towards Alan, her best and truest friend; he would never forgive her, she felt certain of that, as she recalled again and again during that sleepless night the look which was to haunt her for many a long day to come.

Well she knew his honest nature, his hatred of anything that even bordered on untruth, and the sternness with which he would resent the long deception she had practised towards his mother and himself. If she could have escaped somewhere and hidden herself out of his sight until his anger had in a measure abated she would gladly have done so, but there was no help for her, she must return home as it was arranged in two days more.

Would Alan be there already she wondered, or would she have time to appeal

to his mother for sympathy and kindness before he returned with his mind full of bitter, hard thoughts of her whom he had so truly loved? And whom she loved too, in return, as Lina now acknowledged; for never in her happiest moments had her heart yearned towards him as it did now; she longed to throw herself at his feet in utter abasement of spirit, to tell him that though she had forfeited his love he had gained hers for ever, and then to leave him never again to see his face, unless he should seek her after long years and say, "Lina, I have forgiven you."

But this was impossible; she must bear the burthen of her fault in the way it was given her to do, not as she would choose herself.

In the early morning, when the rest of the household were stirring, she fell asleep, wearied out both in body and mind by the

conflict of emotion through which she had passed, and her maid, coming in with a note that had just been sent, found her still sleeping, with a face so pale, bearing such traces of agitation, that she hesitated to awake her, and placing the note on the bed where Lina would see it, she stole gently out of the room again.

An hour later Lina awoke refreshed from her sleep, but with that dull consciousness of pain of which the recent presence, whether mental or physical, always makes itself felt. Her eye lighted on the little note which lay on the bed, and with an eager hand she seized it, recognising the address in Alan's handwriting. As she was about to open it she paused a moment as if to gain courage for its perusal, but this was not needed as she soon found, for the note contained only these few lines :—

"MY DEAR LINA:—I am obliged to return to Southampton this morning, but my mother wishes me to accompany you in your journey to Tenbrook, which she tells me is fixed to take place on Friday. I cannot leave until Saturday, unfortunately; but if you are willing to delay your journey for a day we can travel together. If this will suit you let me have a line to say so, naming the train, and I will meet you at the station. Address your answer to me as usual at Southampton, but do not put yourself to any inconvenience on my account, if you prefer keeping to your present arrangement. Yours sincerely, ALLAN MURRAY."

The note fell from her hand as she read the stiff, formal words, and her first impulse was to send a reply couched in the same terms, refusing to delay her journey; but this she soon felt would be

wrong, besides throwing away from her the chance which now seemed offered of attempting some sort of reconciliation with Alan. His note was cold, but what else had she to expect from him now, and indeed his offer of accompanying her home was more than she deserved under the circumstances, so she resolved to write him a very few lines, merely thanking him for his proposition and agreeing to meet him on Saturday.

Perhaps if they travelled alone together she might have courage to tell him everything, to confess her own weakness and folly, and to implore him to try and think less hardly of her. It would be something gained if she could even do this, and for a moment her heart grew lighter as she thought of it. At any rate she would make the effort to atone for the past by a full, free confession of her faults, by

acknowledging all her want of truthfulness towards Alan, and throwing herself upon his mercy, whilst admitting that her love for him had been fostered into maturity during his absence, as he, when he left home, had so fondly hoped would be the case; she would not let any false feeling of shame prevent her from telling him this truth, even at the risk of his believing that she did so merely as an inducement to him to pardon her errors.

Lina was still in bed, meditating upon what she should say in the important interview with Alan which was to come off on Saturday, when her hostess entered, having come to make inquiries after the invalid, as she styled her young guest.

"I shall ring for your breakfast at once, Lina," she said; "for I found you had hardly tasted any supper last night, and I do not approve of such long fasts for

people who are not strong. I think I shall just stay with you now to see that you eat something, and if not I shall send the doctor up to pay you a visit."

"Yes, do stay with me," answered Lina; "sit down here beside me; for I want to tell you something. But first I must ask you if you will be so kind as to let me stay here until Saturday, instead of leaving to-morrow?"

"You need hardly ask that, dear; you know how pleased both Mr. Hammond and I should be to keep you longer; and the only thing which reconciles me to losing you is, that I feel sure you will be so much better in the country. But what has happened to cause your change of plan?"

"I will tell you." Then colouring deeply, she said, "The gentleman who put me into the carriage last night on leaving the hall was not Captain Charteris as you

supposed—it was Alan Murray. He was outside the door and saw me, but I had no time to ask him any questions, and he was obliged to return to Southampton this morning. I have just received a note from him, asking me if I can put off my journey until Saturday, when he will travel home with me.”

Mrs. Hammond made no remark for a moment as she sat watching the face of the girl, who did not look up whilst she spoke, but played somewhat nervously with the note she held in her hand. Then with her usual bluntness of speech the lady said: “Pray, what was Mr. Murray doing outside the concert-hall door last night, Lina? Was he there to look for you?”

“I think so,” Lina answered, slowly; “but I cannot quite understand it; he must have arrived much sooner than was expected, and have heard from Mrs. Murray

that I was in London ; but how he came to know that I was at the concert I cannot tell."

"I can explain all that," Mrs. Hammond said ; "Burgess tells me that a gentleman called here last night about half-past eight or nine to inquire for you ; that he seemed much surprised when he heard where you were, and refused to leave any name ; no doubt he followed you to the hall, and was watching for your appearance as you came out."

"And he heard it for the first time in such a manner as that, from a servant," murmured the girl. "Oh ! Mrs. Hammond, I shall never forgive myself for all the harm I have done."

"Nonsense, child ; you have only to explain how it all happened to Captain Murray ; he will soon forgive you, and you cannot be harder upon yourself than

he is. It will all come right in a very short time. Of course he is vexed at first, because men always like to have their own way; and he would have liked you to have obeyed him now, though you have not yet taken the vow to do so; but if you follow my advice, you will not be too humble just at first. Tell him you are sorry you broke your promise to him, but that you yielded to great solicitation on my part, that no harm has come of it, and then leave him to come round of himself, which he will soon do, if he cares for you half as much as I believe he does."

Lina shook her head. "If he cared less for me there would be a far greater chance of his forgiving me quickly, because he would not feel it so keenly; but now I know how much I have hurt him. He can never think the same of me again;

for he had such perfect faith in me, and that is why I reproach myself so bitterly."

"But perhaps you are wrong, Lina. Did he tell you last night that he was very angry with you?"

"He had no time; he merely brought me to the carriage, and left me; but I could see his face, and I saw at once that he knew everything."

"Still, do you not think that had he been as much vexed as you suppose, he would hardly have written to ask you to wait for him?" asked Mrs. Hammond.

"It is by his mother's wish that he does so. I believe he would prefer my going on Friday without him," Lina said; "but this I shall not do, as you are kind enough to let me remain here. I am to meet him at the station on Saturday."

"I will tell you what has struck me as a good idea," said kind-hearted Mrs.

Hammond suddenly. "Suppose you let me write to Captain Murray, and tell him how it all came about, taking the blame upon myself, as I certainly ought to do; for had it not been for me you would never have broken your word to him. Let me try and make it all smooth for you before you go home. I cannot bear the idea of your having anything to trouble you, now that you are so far from strong."

"Thank you much for your kind thought, but it would be of no use, and might, indeed, make matters worse, for he would certainly either think that I was afraid of him, and so had asked you to make excuses for me, or that I was so much ashamed of myself that I could not face him until he had given me some token of forgiveness. No, Mrs. Hammond, I would rather speak to Alan

myself, and I mean to do so on the journey, so that I can, at least, re-enter home with a conscience clear of any further deception towards him; for I mean to tell him everything, without making any excuses for myself. It is all I can do now in reparation for the past."

"Well, dear, of course you know best; but I certainly think, as I told you before when we spoke of this at Brighton, that you make a great deal too much of it. I should not wonder, after all, if Captain Murray had merely felt a little jealous of your companion last night, as I suppose he noticed him; and I dare say he was not pleased to see you on the arm of such a fine-looking man, who evidently entertains no small amount of admiration for you too."

This she said jestingly, hoping to raise a smile to the girl's pale face; but the

grave, sad look never left it, as she replied: "Alan could hardly feel jealous on such slight provocation, I think, and I must have had some escort from the hall. But here comes my breakfast. You will scold me if I do not eat it, and really it is so disgracefully late that I must make haste, or I shall not be dressed till mid-day."

"Never mind, dear, if you feel rested; that is all I care about. This afternoon we must take a drive, for you to say good-bye to some of our friends, and you can write to Captain Murray when we come in again."

Lina thought that occupation would not take her very long, as she only intended writing a few lines in acknowledgment of Alan's note, and agreeing in his proposition of meeting him at the station, but without touching upon any other subject.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHERE IS HE ?

"The best-laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft a-gley ;
And leave us naught but grief and pain
For promised joy."

GERTRUDE CHARTERIS endeavoured, for the sake of her father and mother, to bear bravely the heavy disappointment which she had experienced in not finding her husband awaiting her on her arrival at home that evening.

She had known that in all probability he might have been detained in Scotland until recently, but hoped that his desire to be on the spot to welcome her back

would have brought him to town before there was the slightest chance of the "Goldfinder" completing her homeward voyage. In this case he could not fail, she thought, to receive the telegram she had sent him, and to make his appearance in Seymour Street during the course of the evening. No answer had been received to the message Mr. Stevenson had despatched to his son-in-law, therefore he could scarcely be in Scotland at present.

Alice, whose happiness in regaining her home was without alloy, watched with much pain the visible effort made by her sister to conceal her disappointment from the eyes of the fond parents, whose joy in having their beloved children once more restored to them was so great, that they forgot for a time that there was one whose welcome to their eldest daughter would have been more precious even than

their own, and whose place was by his young wife's side at such a moment.

Gertrude was too unselfish to allow her own feelings to mar the harmony of this happy family reunion ; so, resolutely striving to forget herself and her bitter disappointment, she entered into Alice's lively description of the voyage, the eccentricities of some of their fellow-passengers, and the kindness they had experienced throughout from their captain. It was true her attention often wandered, and that at the sound of the door-bell, or of a passing carriage, she would break off in what she was saying to listen to the sounds ; and once as a cab rattled noisily up to the next house she half started from her seat, with a face of joyous expectation ; but the time wore on, the evening passed away, and still he did not come.

“Bertram will be here to-morrow, I have no doubt, or at least you will hear from him in the morning; and as he has not come, I cannot help feeling a little glad that we have had our darlings to ourselves for this one evening. Your father and I have missed you both more than we can tell you,” and Mrs. Stevenson looked as if she could never part with her children again, as she wished them both good-night and left them together.

But the door had scarcely closed upon her mother before Gertrude’s self-restraint gave way; and, to Alice’s dismay, she cried most bitterly, talking in the wildest manner about her husband having deserted her, and wishing that she had never left home, or had died out in Australia, as it was evident Bertram had forgotten her.

To all this Alice listened in silence for a few minutes, then she set herself reso-

lutely to work to restore her sister to a happier frame of mind, though it was some time before she could succeed. Gertrude's nature was a most affectionate, but at the same time an extremely weak one, and was unable to bear with equanimity the trial to which she had been exposed that night, even though, as Alice pointed out to her, all her anxieties would probably be set at rest on the morrow.

"He might have come! he might have come!" she kept repeating in answer to her sister's entreaties that she would be calm.

"Now, Gertrude, you really are unreasonable in this matter; you know that we were not expected to arrive for some days, and that Bertram has certainly been in attendance on his father until quite lately. What can be more likely than that he has started for England, and is spending a few days with friends on the way, and so

missed the telegram that papa sent him? He is certain to be here soon; I should not wonder if he is travelling south at this very moment, and may appear at breakfast in the morning. At any rate, nothing has occurred to give the slightest shadow of foundation to all your foolish fancies, and I am really surprised you should indulge in them. Of course I know it was a great disappointment to you not to see him this evening, and you tried to bear it bravely, but for my part I never expected to find him here. If you do not go to sleep quickly you will lose all your beauty, and undo the benefit of the voyage. Mama says she never saw you look so blooming in your life, and it would be a pity if Bertram could not say the same when he sees you to-morrow. Now good-night, for I am half-asleep myself, and you must be very tired I know."

"I am sorry, Alice," said poor, penitent Gertrude, whose tears had now ceased; "but I think it was the keeping up all evening that made me give way now so foolishly. You cannot think how I *long* to see Bertram again, and how I chafe against even this short delay in his coming. However, I will try and get quickly to sleep, to please you."

Apparently the effort had not been successful, for the following morning, when Alice went into her sister's room, she found her looking pale and tired, with dark lines under her eyes, which were heavy and swollen from want of sleep. Just when she should have been looking her best, it seemed as if her newly-recovered good looks had deserted her.

She confessed to having had a bad night, and consented to Alice's proposal that she should stay in bed for the pre-

sent, as she really did not feel equal to rising before she had her breakfast. She eagerly inquired for letters, and could hardly believe it when told that nothing had been heard from her husband. Alice, too, began to think it rather strange, but would not allow her sister to perceive that she did so.

Towards noon Mrs. Charteris made her appearance downstairs, and came into the breakfast-room, where she found her sister alone.

“Mama was obliged to go out, Gertrude, to keep an appointment; she told me to say how vexed she was that she could not wait to see you first. You do not look rested yet,” she added, noticing Gertrude’s languid air and manner.

“I really have had nothing to fatigue me, but I feel quite tired and worn out this morning. I cannot think what has

become of Bertram, Alice ; surely something must have happened to him."

"Now, Gertrude, you are not to begin with those foolish fancies again ; you know I combated them all last night."

"Yes, but you assured me he would be here this morning."

"So he may ; the morning is not over yet, and Bertram was always lazy in his movements. Come and help me to decide which of these Australian curiosities shall be given to papa and which to mama. Some we must keep ourselves, and some we can give away to any friends who may feel interested in our voyage to the antipodes."

"How quickly you have unpacked them ; whilst I have been idly lying in bed, too."

"Well, to tell you the truth, the sun shone so brightly into my room that I

could not sleep, and its brilliancy made me almost imagine I must be in the country; but what was my disappointment on looking out to behold nothing but houses and chimneys, with a faint haze of London smoke already dimming the atmosphere. At first I felt as if I could scarcely breathe, as if the houses must fall and suffocate me, so great was the contrast to the glorious stretch of sea that has met our gaze on waking every morning for the last two months."

"For my part, I was thankful to have a comfortable bed, and plenty of space to dress in, in exchange for our cramped little cabin. How can people have the face to call them state rooms? As well christen our old doll-house up in the nursery a mansion!"

"Ah, Gertrude! you never were romantic, or a lover of nature. I believe you

prefer the chimney stacks to the waves, in your heart, if you dared confess so to me. Look here," Alice continued, taking up a large photograph from amongst a number that lay on the table, "I lay claim to this for my very own, as children say, for I have pleasant recollections connected with the spot."

"That reminds me, Alice; have you said anything yet to papa about Mr. DalGLISH?"

"Not yet; I could not commence upon the subject directly we entered the house, and I have had no opportunity this morning. I mean to tell him everything to-night, as I do not think it right to conceal it from him longer."

"I wonder what he will say?" mused Mrs. Charteris. "Do you feel afraid, Alice? I should be, if I were in your place."

“Afraid!” echoed the girl; “certainly not. I have done nothing with which my own conscience can reproach me, and therefore have nothing to fear. Besides, I cannot believe that when I have told him the exact facts papa can be so unreasonable as to throw any fresh obstacle in the way. He has never heard the full truth, and when he does hear it, and finds that Malcolm and I are still true to each other after all these years, I do not think he will be very hard upon us. I am too happy to entertain any misgivings on the subject at present.”

She did, indeed, look happy as she chatted gaily with her sister, intent only upon preventing Gertrude from letting her thoughts dwell too exclusively on the continued absence of her husband. It was for this purpose that she had, immediately after breakfast, and assisted by

her maid, unpacked the box of presents which they had brought back with them, knowing that if she could succeed in keeping Gertrude's attention fixed on them, she could prevent her from noticing how quickly the time passed. She saw the nervous glance at the clock now and then, and the wandering attention; but taking no heed of these, she continued talking and discussing the destination of the various articles with which the table was strewn; and so busily were the sisters engaged at last in their task that neither heard the door-bell ring, and both were startled and surprised when, unannounced, Captain Charteris appeared upon the scene.

CHAPTER XV.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

"Those who are of kindred souls rarely wed together, far more rarely than those who are akin by blood."

WITH a cry of delight, Gertrude sprang forward to meet her husband.

"Oh, Bertram! here you are at last. I thought you were never coming," and she clasped her arms about his neck as he stooped to kiss her, her joy at his appearance, and her emotion on seeing him again being so intense that it was with difficulty she could restrain her tears, though with a great effort she kept them

back, remembering even at that moment her husband's dislike to any display of feeling.

Alice would like to have escaped from the room, if possible, even before speaking to her brother-in-law at all, so that she might leave the two long-parted ones to hold their first interview unwitnessed, for apart from the knowledge that this would be most in keeping with her sister's feelings, she herself had almost dreaded this meeting, she scarce knew why.

Instinct told her that the reunion to which poor Gertrude had looked forward so eagerly, for which she had yearned with all the intensity of that tender love she bore her husband, would not add to his happiness, but rather perhaps the reverse, inasmuch as it would deprive him to a certain extent of much of the liberty he had enjoyed during the absence of his wife.

If this were so, she much feared that Captain Charteris would not have sufficient regard for her sister's feelings to dissemble his own, and that disappointment and mortification alone might be the result of this day's meeting.

For these reasons, then, Alice wished to make her escape unperceived, and endeavoured to do so; but Captain Charteris, whose greeting to his wife was scarcely so prolonged as might have been expected under the circumstances, seeing her intention, immediately frustrated it by advancing towards her with outstretched hand. It is possible that his anxiety to be alone with his wife was not so strong as his sense of politeness in this instance.

"Alice, you are not going to run away without speaking to me, I hope," he said, and she reluctantly turned back into the room, whilst he shook hands with her, and

in brotherly fashion kissed her cheek. Now Alice had never liked her brother-in-law sufficiently to permit of his being on those intimate terms with her which his relationship warranted, and this was actually only the second occasion on which he had presumed so to greet her, the first having been on the day of his marriage.

In her present state of mind she somewhat resented this, for, be it known, she was a young lady with whom outward demonstrations were scarce, and it may have added to her annoyance at being detained in the room, causing her to speak in a slightly vexed tone, as she said: "I thought you and Gertrude might like to be left together. She has been looking so anxiously for your appearance ever since we arrived."

"We have no secrets to exchange, I suppose, have we, Gertrude? Nothing at

any rate from which we need exclude Alice."

"Oh no," said his wife in rather a disappointed tone, "of course we have no secrets, at least, I have none. Pray do not go, Alice."

"No, you must stay and help Gertrude to give me an account of all your adventures. I have so much to hear from you both."

He seated himself on the sofa, and his wife nestled close to his side, whilst her hand stole into his; but though he suffered her to do this, he did not respond in any way to her gentle and timid advances, and beyond the slight embrace on first meeting her, he evinced no further sign of affection, or of pleasure at being again in her society.

Seldom had Alice felt more uncomfortable; she knew that she should not be

there, that the first hour of their reunion should be sacred to the pair so long divided; but since one so evidently wished to avoid a *tête-à-tête*, it was not for her to suggest the propriety of her withdrawing, so she must perforce remain for a time. It was clearly better that her sister should think her unkind for staying in the room, than that leaving them together she should be hurt and wounded by coldness or indifference which it was but too apparent was all she had to expect from the husband she so blindly loved.

Accordingly Alice took a chair by the table on which were spread the photographs and other different things, on the selection of which they had been engaged when Captain Charteris entered, and continuing the occupation, she hoped the conversation would be sustained without much help from herself.

But it seemed strangely to flag, and a constraint to rest upon both husband and wife from the very first.

A few questions were asked by Bertram as to the arrival at Southampton, the journey up to town, and other matters; but nothing of a personal nature was said, and one would almost have fancied the two were mere acquaintances exchanging remarks on a recent voyage of pleasure, rather than knit together by the closest of bonds, and but now united again after a lengthened absence on the part of one, who, when she left her husband's side, had scarce hoped ever to regain it.

Alice at last looked up.

"You have not told Gertrude what you think of her improved appearance, Bertram; has not the voyage achieved wonders for her?"

"She looks stronger than ~~when~~ she left

home certainly, but not nearly so well as I had expected from the brilliant accounts she sent of herself from Melbourne."

"You must not judge of her to-day; she had a bad night, which always upsets her. When she is looking well, you will be astonished at the difference in her. You should have seen her last night, when we first arrived."

"I see you have really grown a little stouter, Gertrude," said he, turning to his wife, and disregarding the latter part of Alice's sentence, which Gertrude, however, did not.

"Yes, Bertram; why did you not come last night? I was so disappointed not to see you all the evening."

"I did not hear of your arrival until eleven o'clock. You would scarcely have expected me to alarm the household by appearing at that unseemly hour?"

might arrive sooner than was expected?" asked Gertrude, pleased with this seeming proof of her husband's anxiety to meet her.

"Well, no; not exactly that," and he hesitated. "I had some business in town this week, and came up for it. I did not think you could possibly be here for several days longer."

"It was strange that being in town you should not have called on papa to know if there were any news of us. He did not even know if you were here or in Scotland still."

"I tell you, Gertrude, I had no notion you could be here before next week. Of course I should have called on your father in a day or two, as soon as I had time."

"And what has made you so busy?" asked his wife. "It is new for you to have business in London."

“Oh, different things,” he answered, carelessly, feeling horribly guilty, for, to do the man justice, he had some conscience, and was not without a sense of shame as he saw the happiness his young wife experienced on being with him again, and felt how little capable he was of entering into or reciprocating her feelings. Nay, he was even attempting to deceive her into the belief that important business had brought him to London, when in truth it had been his own erring love for another; and in thus gratifying his guilty passion by procuring to himself a few hours spent in the presence of Lina Heathcote, he had brought perhaps unknown misery upon *her*, for who could doubt that the man who had thrust him aside in anger the night before, was the accepted lover of that fair girl?

He had instantly recognised him to be

the captain under whose charge his wife had sailed, though he had not been aware of any previous connection between Alan Murray and the girl whose irresistible fascination he had been unable to withstand.

"Then when you got to your club last night it was quite a pleasant surprise to find my telegram awaiting you?" questioned Gertrude.

"Quite," her husband replied, laconically, with a faint attempt at a smile.

"Had you been dining out, Bertram?"

"No, not last night."

"Then where were you?"

"I spent the evening with some friends, Gertrude; how many more questions are you going to ask me?"

"There was no harm in my asking them," she said, with a little quiver in her voice; "it is natural I should like to

know where you were, as I fancied you always dined at the club whilst I was away, unless you were with friends."

"But I have just told you that I was with friends," and again he spoke impatiently.

"Look here, Bertram; do you think this will be an appropriate present for old Mrs. Newton, or do you think it will remind her too painfully of her dear old captain, whose voyages we have heard described so many times that Gertrude and I know them all off by heart?" Alice interposed hurriedly, to distract his attention, as she saw from her sister's expression that the situation was becoming critical.

She really felt so indignant that it was with difficulty she could speak quietly, but she effected her purpose, and drew Captain Charteris's attention to the table. He

rose and came up to it, followed by Gertrude, and for a few minutes Alice succeeded in keeping the conversation fixed on the many beautiful and curious objects that lay before them, then seeing that a happier look had come into her sister's face, she decided to leave them together for a short time, and saying that she fancied she heard her mother come in, she slipped from the room.

An awkward silence ensued for a minute or two, then suddenly Gertrude turned, and before he could divine her intention she had flung herself on to her husband's breast, and in a wild half-whisper she was saying: "Bertram, I *cannot* understand you; you do not seem to care about seeing me again. What does it all mean? I have longed and hoped so for this meeting, and now it all seems to end in disappointment. Ah! do not put me from you,

not here to meet me last evening I began to fancy you had forgotten me, and that you would not come. Say that you are really pleased to have me again, dear," and she looked into his face with an agony of beseeching which he had never seen before in the sweet, loving eyes that met his own.

He could not bear their truthful gaze; it seemed as if they must read his secret heart, and to hide his face from her more effectually he bent and kissed the pleading lips.

"I am very pleased to have you back again, Gertrude; I do not think a bachelor's life is good for me now."

"I thought you did not look very well," she answered, flushed and pleased with his tardy caress; "I must take care of you now I am so strong myself. Then nothing has come between us, Bertram?"

“What do you mean?” he said, startled;
“what could come between us?”

“I do not know; one hears strange stories sometimes of husbands forgetting their wives during long separations, and I did not know what you might have been doing whilst I was away. We quite surprised them at home by arriving so soon. Captain Murray himself never expected we should be in before Monday; I forgot to tell you that he brought us up to town yesterday. He heard at Southampton that the girl to whom he is engaged is now in London, so he hurried up at once to see her. I did not know it then, but Alice told me this morning the reason of his being so anxious to come up here for the night; he had to return to his ship to-day.”

“And how did he know she was in London?” Captain Charteris forced himself to inquire.

"His mother wrote to Southampton to tell him. I think Alice said something about their travelling home together."

"Did he know what Miss Heath—— what she was doing in London?" he steadied his voice sufficiently to ask.

"Yes; staying with some friends, I believe. But how did you come to know her name, Bertram?"

"I know the name of Captain Murray's *fiancée*? Impossible, Gertrude."

"You mentioned a name just this minute in speaking of her I thought, but I must have been mistaken, for I do not even know it myself. We all liked our captain so very much; I want you to ask him to come and see us some day, and if he marries soon, as Alice thinks he will, he must bring his wife, who, he says, is pretty, and charming, and all the rest of it. But then as he is in love with her his opinion is not

worth much, and I dare say she is some commonplace little country girl after all."

"Very likely," assented Captain Charteris, whilst his thoughts, as if in contradiction to his words, flew to Lina as he had seen her the night before in all her glowing beauty, and a pang shot through his heart as he felt that he might never look upon that face again, or hear that voice whose melodious tones were even yet ringing in his ears.

"Still she is pretty sure to be presentable, as he is such a gentleman himself," pursued Gertrude, in her innocence. "You will not mind asking them by-and-bye, will you?"

"It is rather soon to settle that question yet, we can do so after the marriage has taken place," was the answer, given in a constrained voice; "in the mean-

and he led the way to one where two ladies were already seated.

Lina's heart sank as she saw and comprehended his motive in the selection of this particular compartment. It was but too evident that he did not wish to be alone with her, perhaps that in his present angry mood he would not trust himself, and she knew that her sole chance of pleading for his forgiveness before she once more became an inmate of his home was gone. Alan moved away under pretext of looking after the luggage, taking tickets, and buying newspapers. When he returned Mrs. Hammond said to him :

"I hope you will take good care of Lina. She is not at all well, and I tried to persuade her to put off travelling for another week, but she would not listen to me. She is really hardly fit for the journey to-day."

disappointed if I do not receive better accounts of her very soon."

"Country air can do wonders, Mrs. Hammond, but there are some things it cannot effect," and there was a bitterness of tone in his voice which Lina had never heard before.

She could scarcely restrain her tears as she bade good-bye to the friend whose real but mistaken kindness had, in fact, caused all the trouble she now suffered, and that which she felt was impending; and it was with a fast sinking heart that she took her seat in the train.

Alan placed himself beside her, where he could not see her face without turning to speak to her; and Lina felt that this, too, was intentional. He opened his newspaper, cut it in half, and offered her part of it; but she declined it, saying she had a book with her which she wanted to

“ Did you speak, Lina ? ”

“ Yes ; but I only wanted to know what time we should arrive at Tenbrook ? ”

“ I thought I had told you at 5.10 ; but here is Bradshaw, you can study it for yourself. ”

He gave it her, and relapsed into silence. She was obliged to appear interested in the exact times for the few stop-pages which occurred in the train, which was a fast express, but in reality she cared little when they arrived at their journey's end, for intolerable as it was to her, she felt that the future perhaps might be worse. If Alan had only been kind to her she could have told him everything, have gone on her knees to him in her humble entreaties for his pardon and restored confidence ; but her heart swelled with indignation against his present treatment, and she told herself that if it continued she

could not remain in the same house with him.

As the hours passed she grew faint and wearied ; but though she felt the heat she dared not raise her veil, for in her utter misery and weakness the tears which she could not check fell down the pale cheeks, and she must not let such folly be seen. By-and-by she seemed to sink into a kind of waking dream, conscious, yet not fully herself ; then she felt as if all power, even life itself, were leaving her, and remembered nothing more till she opened her eyes to find one of the ladies who had travelled from London in the same carriage, bathing her face with eau-de-Cologne, whilst her sister knelt beside her, fanning her. Lina tried to raise her head, but the lady would not allow her to move, as she said, "Wait a few minutes ; we have some wine for you here

if you can manage to drink it. I have a steady hand, and will hold it whilst you try and swallow a little ; it will do you good."

Some one, whom Lina knew must be Alan, handed a small glass tumbler to the lady, who took it, holding it to the white lips of the still half-fainting girl. She drank it eagerly. Presently the slight colour came slowly back to her face, and she was able to sit up, thanking most gratefully the two ladies who had proved such true friends in need.

She took no notice of Alan for a few minutes, till she heard his voice, in which she fancied she detected a shade of the old tenderness, as he said, " Lina, are you really better now, or would you like to get out at the next station we stop at, and wait all night there? It can easily be done, if you do not feel equal to going on the whole way."

She turned to meet his anxious look, but answered with a faint attempt at a smile, "I feel better now, and would rather go on to Tenbrook, thank you, Alan; it cannot be much more than an hour longer now before we get there."

Then she spoke again to the two ladies, asking them how it had happened, and whether she had really fainted.

"Yes, indeed you did," said one. "I was watching you, because I had seen you draw off your gloves as if you felt faint, and I saw how white you looked even through your veil; so I was just in time to catch you as you fell forward. I think it would have been better if you had not kept down your veil, as it is so hot always in the train this weather."

"Perhaps so," Lina said. "I am sure it was the heat, for I have felt it a good deal lately. I am so very much obliged to

you for being so kind to me ; I do not know what I should have done if you had not been here."

The two ladies left the train at the next and last place at which it stopped previously to arriving at Tenbrook ; they took leave of Lina with many kind expressions, for they felt interested in this beautiful girl, in whose face they saw traces of recent sorrow, and whose companion, though they felt convinced he was not her brother, evinced such a strange indifference towards her.

Lina expressed the wish for a cup of tea, but did not feel equal to the exertion of getting out of the carriage just then, so Alan brought it to her, waiting outside on the platform until she had finished it ; but without speaking more to her than repeating his inquiry as to whether she was quite sure she felt well enough to

continue the journey, which would last for three-quarters of an hour longer.

"I think you had better sit by the window, Lina," he said, as he re-entered the carriage, pointing to the seat he had occupied; she did so, and this time he placed himself opposite to her.

They continued their journey for some time longer in silence, but there was no pretence of reading now. Lina leant back, her head resting against the cushion, and her eyes shaded with her hand as if she could not bear the light.

Once or twice she stole a glance at her companion, but he was apparently looking intently at something through the window and did not notice her. At last they neared their destination, and Lina in her sore trouble determined to make one effort to soften the heart which she feared was hardening towards her for ever.

"Alan," she said, and her voice was piteous in its beseeching tone; "can you not *try* to forgive me?"

For an instant their eyes met, but his were quickly averted.

"It is too soon to ask me that question, Lina," he said, coldly; "I have yet to learn how much there is to forgive."

She said no more then, nor did she make any other attempt to avail herself of the few remaining moments in which she might have made some further appeal, for she knew that at that time it was useless.

And yet could she but have read his heart, where the deep passionate love was struggling for the mastery with the justly wounded feelings roused by her treachery; could she have known that as he now and again glanced furtively at the lovely but agitated countenance before him, he could

CHAPTER XVII.

CHANGED.

"My joys are wingless all and dead."

MRS. MURRAY had been in no small state of excitement and expectation all that day, and as the hour drew near for the arrival of the travellers she quite astonished her niece by the unwonted alacrity of her movements, for she was up and down stairs half-a-dozen times in the course of the afternoon, putting a finishing stroke, as she said, to the rooms, though all this had been already arranged under Mary's careful management some hours previously.

“Now, aunt, do sit down and rest a little, or you will be too tired to enjoy seeing them when they do come; they will be here in half-an-hour, so settle yourself in this arm-chair for the present, whilst I see that the tea is all ready for them, for I am sure they will want it.”

“Ah, I dare say you think me very fussy, my dear; but it is a long time since I have seen either of my children, and I cannot help being a little excited about it. But this is the last time it will happen, as I do not expect Alan will go to sea again.”

Mary Wood had been initiated into the secret of her cousin's love affair, and she was rather curious to see this beautiful Lina Heathcote, whom she could barely remember, having once seen her as almost a child; she was a little interested, too, on her own account, as her aunt had ex-

pressed a strong wish that her niece should take up her abode at Tenbrook when Alan's marriage should have deprived the old lady of her present companion, and Mary was not at all unwilling to give up her governess life for so much pleasanter an occupation.

As is but too often the case when any event has been looked forward to with more than usual interest, the result of Mrs. Murray's pleasurable anticipations was disappointment; from the moment that her son and Lina entered the house a cloud seemed to rest upon it which no effort could dispel. Mrs. Murray had met the travellers at the hall-door with a most hearty welcome to them both, and had then drawn Lina into the pretty little parlour that she might have a good look at her; but this she found to be anything but satisfactory, for she gave vent to most

have something to eat. She must be quite tired."

It was the kindest thing that Alan had said yet, and Lina felt quite grateful to him. Mrs. Murray was horrified to hear of the fainting fit, and renewed her threat of sending for the doctor, in whom she had the greatest confidence, but Lina refused even to listen to such a suggestion, and then hurried up to her own room to take off her hat and cloak.

She was longer over the operation than seemed necessary, and when she at last came down, Mary Wood's quick eye detected the signs of tears, which quite confirmed her in the suspicion that her cousin and his lady-love had quarrelled on the journey, for she had never seen Alan so quiet or so grave as on the present occasion. He exerted himself to

talk to his mother, but it was evidently an effort to do so.

When Lina came down she found the rest of the party in the dining-room, and Mrs. Murray called to her to come to her usual place, saying she had never allowed Mary to occupy it, but had always kept it as belonging especially to her favourite.

Lina took the chair kept for her; but as she looked round the cheerful little room, with all the well-known objects, the windows wide opened on to the pretty lawn, and then reflected on the gulf which she herself had raised between the present and the last time when she had taken her place by Mrs. Murray's side, her lip quivered convulsively as she with difficulty kept down the sobs to which she had given way when alone in her own room.

“Now, dear, make a good tea, for I am sure you must want it, and then you shall rest for an hour on the sofa, or go to bed as early as you like. I will not tease you to-night with questions about what you have been doing, but I shall expect a long account as soon as you are well enough to give it me. What a fortunate thing it was that I thought of letting Alan know you were still in London. I had not an idea that he would really arrive in time to bring you home, but I thought I might as well run the chance. It was much pleasanter for you than travelling alone.”

Lina made some indistinct reply, which might have been taken for an assent, but it did not seem that either she or Alan had been as much charmed as they ought to have been by the opportunity afforded them of making the journey

from London to Tenbrook in each other's society.

Out of regard for her fatigue, Lina was allowed to take her tea in comparative silence, whilst Mrs. Murray chatted away to her son about various things which had happened during his absence, he being only too thankful to keep the conversation from touching upon anything of a personal nature. After tea they moved into the drawing-room, where Lina was made to lie down on the sofa, which she refused to have wheeled into the window, on the plea that it hurt her eyes as her head ached.

Alan placed himself where he could see her, for in truth he was beginning to feel anxious about her health, now that he saw how sadly changed she was, how pale now that no excitement flushed her cheeks, as on that night when he had

first seen her; and at that recollection he grew bitter again, though his heart had been relenting towards her even when outwardly he had been the most severe.

As the evening passed on Mrs. Murray grew more and more puzzled by what she saw, whilst an unpleasant conviction forced itself upon her mind that all was not as it should be between her son and Lina. Formerly he had no eyes but for her; he addressed nearly all his conversation to her, till his mother used to declare that if she wanted really to hear anything from him, she must exclude Lina from the room altogether.

In short, his bearing had been that of a most devoted lover, in which capacity she expected again to see him; but instead of this there seemed some inexplicable barrier between them, which

caused them to shun looking at or speaking to each other more than was quite unavoidable, whilst the coldness of Alan's tone when he spoke to Lina had not escaped his mother's notice. He looked grave and troubled, too, which was most unusual with one of his happy, cheerful disposition, whilst she felt certain there was more to account for the girl's changed appearance than could be attributed to the mere heat of the weather.

The kind-hearted woman was much grieved by the signs she noticed, for she loved Lina as if she were indeed her own daughter, and she could only hope their estrangement arose from some temporary cause, which would easily be removed by a mutual explanation, for which she resolved to give them an early opportunity on the morrow. So totally unused was she to such conduct on the

part of the two young people, that even the gratification of seeing her son home again could not compensate for the uneasiness she experienced, and as she looked from one to the other, striving in vain to read an explanation in their faces, Mrs. Murray gradually allowed the conversation to drop, until at length a silence stole upon the little party which it appeared no one was inclined to break.

It was just at the close of that twilight hour, so blissful to those who are in the full enjoyment of health and spirits, but charged with painful recollections of by-gone days to those whose time of happiness is over, or whose hearts are saddened with the weight of present sorrow; it is an hour to be appreciated only when those we love are with us, not when they are absent or estranged from us in spirit, which is harder still.

“We are growing very quiet, mother,” Alan said at last, rousing himself, and half stifling a heavy sigh. “I think I had better ring for lights. We do not seem able to talk in the dark.”

The lights were accordingly brought, and Mrs. Murray made a pretence of getting out her work; but though it was seldom she gave her busy fingers any rest, they did not seem very actively employed this evening. She carefully adjusted her spectacles, but it was only that she might the better see Lina's face, as she lay still on the sofa, hardly speaking, but answering to all inquiries that she was really quite well, only a little tired.

“I shall be terribly disappointed if you do not look very different in another week's time, after I have nursed you up a little, my dear; and you may depend

upon this, that I shall never let you go to London again if this is to be the result. I wonder, Alan, you did not tell me that Lina was not looking well, as of course you must have seen her the day you wrote to tell me you were going up to London."

"I only saw her to speak to for a moment," he replied. "I did not get to town till late, and Lina was engaged."

Too much engaged to see Alan for more than a minute! This was indeed strange. What could it all mean? But Mrs. Murray was a sensible old lady, and made no comment at the time, though her motherly instinct taught her that her son had been badly treated in some way, and a faint shade of resentment arose in her mind, only to be as quickly dispelled when she looked again at Lina. The girl's eyes were fixed upon Alan's

face, and they wore an expression of beseeching tenderness which it would have been hard for him to resist had he chanced to meet it; but he did not look up, and the stern lines about his mouth never relaxed in their severity.

“By-the-bye, Alan, you have not told me about the two ladies who sailed with you,” said his mother, after another short silence had ensued. “Are they quite strong again after their long voyage?”

“Only one of them was delicate, and she has made a wonderful recovery; in fact, her sister says she never saw her looking so well before.”

“That is a good thing; but I am sure I wonder how two young ladies could undertake such an expedition by themselves, without either father or husband to take care of them. In my young days such a thing would not have been heard

of, but I suppose girls are made of tougher materials in these times."

"You would not say so if you could see the two ladies in question, for one of them is a most timid, shrinking little creature, quite dependent upon her younger sister for assistance and advice. You pay me rather a poor compliment too, mother, for you forget that they were placed under my care, and chose to remain in Melbourne till they could return with me."

"Yes, I know that. But why did not the lady's husband accompany her himself?"

"He was too much occupied in England," was the hasty reply, with a hurried glance at Lina.

"But I thought you said he was rather a fine gentleman, and that he did not seem to care very much about his wife

at parting from her," pursued Mrs. Murray.

"Did I? Well, perhaps it might be so. I was certainly rather surprised to find how cool he was about it all, and I had not much faith, either, in the business which detained him in England, but that was not my affair if his wife was satisfied. Do you not think these flowers are rather strong to be in the room at night?" he added, rising to remove them, and at the same time change the subject of conversation.

"I had not noticed them, but you can take them out if you like. I have been trying," she continued, as Alan re-entered the room, "to recollect the name of the invalid lady—it was rather a curious one—was it not Charteris, the Hon. Mrs. Charteris?"

Alan gave an inaudible assent, and

his mother unconsciously pursued the topic, though every word was a fresh stab to two of her listeners.

"I thought that was the name, though you only mentioned it once or twice, but I saw it afterwards in the paper. Her husband's father is Lord Mountford, and they were afraid he was dying lately. I wonder if he got better, or if Mrs. Charteris finds herself with a new name now she has returned to England."

"I believe he is better," Alan forced himself to say; "at least I heard nothing to the contrary when I took the two sisters home to their father's house the other night."

"And was Mrs. Charteris's husband pleased to see her?" inquired the old lady.

"He was not there—but, mother, look at Lina, she has fainted again!" and

he was at her side in an instant, supporting her drooping figure, his own face but a shade less pale than hers.

They gave her the usual restoratives, but this time it seemed not so easy to bring her back from the trance-like state into which she had fallen, and it was long before even a semblance of life returned to the still form over which bent loving hearts and hands; no sooner was she in some degree conscious than she fell back again into the fainting state, whose long continuance alarmed Mrs. Murray, as she had never seen anything of the kind in Lina before.

“You had better carry her upstairs, Alan, then Mary and I will put her to bed whilst you go for Mr. Barton. I think he ought certainly to see her to-night, she must be in such a very weak state.”

Alan took the slight form in his arms

without a word, and carried her up to her own room, but his mother saw him tremble from head to foot as he did so, though she knew well it could not be from the weight of the burden he carried, which was as nothing to the strong sailor.

Lina's head, with its glossy chestnut braids, lay inanimate on his shoulder, it even touched his cheek as he stooped to place her gently on the bed, and as he felt the soft contact, the crimson blood suffused his face with a deep but half bitter and passionate emotion.

He turned from the room, passed down the staircase, out into the still summer air, without the power of uttering one word; he had held her for a brief space in his arms, but she had laid there all unconscious of the loving heart which beat against her own, and which had throbbed so wildly with the suppressed

passion of the moment that he had hardly strength to carry her, light though she was.

What folly had been his to suppose that he had ceased to care for her, when he now acknowledged that never had he loved her so intensely as at this moment, when her own weakness had proclaimed that she loved another; the undefined dread which he had striven to put from him had taken tangible form now, and he knew that Lina had in all innocence given her heart into the keeping of one who had no right to demand it, whose conduct had been of the basest, most shameful description.

“The scoundrel!” he muttered between his teeth, as after summoning Mr. Barton he walked up and down the little garden, unable to bear the solitude of the deserted rooms; “to pass himself off as an unmarried man, and taking advantage of an

inexperienced girl to gain her affection merely to please himself for an hour. No punishment would suffice for such villany, for what can be adequate to the misery he has produced; yet, for his poor wife's sake as well as for hers, I must let the matter rest. No breath of scandal must taint her fair name, but heaven grant that I may never be tempted to vengeance by meeting that man alone!"

He had almost forgotten his own wrongs and suffering now in his indignation against Captain Charteris, and his pity for Lina; he could not doubt the truth of the conclusion to which he had at once arrived as he recalled the startled look with which she had first heard the name of Alan's invalid passenger, followed by the expression of shame and contrition which he had so fatally misinterpreted.

He had watched the effect of his mother's words, and as he saw the flitting colour on the beautiful face, with the long deathlike swoon which ensued, he felt it impossible not to believe that the knowledge thus unexpectedly obtained had been a blow to the girl's fondest hopes, and that she was indeed a sufferer from this man's treachery.

What more likely than that he, with his handsome face and winning manners, had captivated a young girl fresh from a quiet country life, too simple to detect the hollowness of his professions of love. It was in part his own doing, too, Alan reflected, for he had left her free, he would not take her promise when she had been willing to give it him, and now the consequences would be most lamentable, both to himself and to her.

More than ever did he feel thankful that

having accepted an immediate engagement he would only have a month at the most to spend at home ; but how to get through even that time in constant daily intercourse with Lina, now that all was changed and he was in possession of her fatal secret, was more than he could bear to think of.

This was not, however, the trial in store for him now, though one of a far deeper nature had to be borne before the young sailor again left his native shores.

END OF VOL. II.



